This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

600064598

CAPTAIN HERBERT

A Sea Story.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:
CHAPMAN AND HALL, 193, PICCADILLY.
1864.

250. h. 188.

[The right of Translation is reserved.]

BIBLIOTHECA·BODLEIANA

CONTENTS OF VOL. III.

CHAPTER I.

PAGE

TWO HEARTS, THAT SHOULD HAVE MET IN SUNSHINE, PASS EACH OTHER DARKLY 1

CHAPTER II.

A SNUG HOME-CIRCLE 24

CHAPTER III.

THE "BUFFALO" PROVES MORE THAN WORTHY OF CONSIDERATION 48

CHAPTER IV.

ETIENNE ETHEREGE (OF UNDERWOOD, KENT), ESQ., TO HIS FRIEND, FLORIAN, VICOMTE DE LA TREBOUILLE . 77

CHAPTER V.

THE IDES OF MARCH APPROACH 101

CHAPTER VI.

BROADBY AND CO.'S CRISIS "TIDED OVER" . . . 118

CHAPTER VII.

PAGE

A Catastrophe befals "Coguel" 130

CHAPTER VIII.

The Fidelity of Matthew Ffloyd 150

CHAPTER IX.

Harry Spencer's News 168

CHAPTER X.

An Archery Meeting at Beauchamp Cliff . . . 200

CHAPTER XI.

The "School for Scandal" has for once a Sequel 231

CHAPTER XII.

A Dark Chapter—Adolphe's Guilt 253

CHAPTER XIII.

Father Joseph, of Kingswood and Norham, visits the Abbé Horne at Herbert Court . . . 276

CHAPTER XIV.

"Lectori debitum Molliori"—Scene the Last . 302

CHAPTER XV.

L'Envoi 325

CAPTAIN HERBERT.

CHAPTER I.

TWO HEARTS, THAT SHOULD HAVE MET IN SUNSHINE, PASS EACH OTHER DARKLY.

HISTORY relates, that after the action last described (fought in the end of 1779, North latitude 12°, longitude West 60°, off Granada), Count D'Estaing having returned to harbour, Admiral Byron made sail for Basseterre Roads, St. Kitt's: where, as he lay refitting at anchor nine days after, the Count "appeared off the roadstead with twenty-eight sail of the line, but did not venture on an attack; and, the British fleet not being then in a condition to put to sea, the enemy, after parading some time, made sail for Cape François."

Days after this, however, the *Bedfordshire* frigate, Sir Charles Douglas commanding, had been dis-

missed with home despatches. The *Astræa* frigate, forty-four, under orders for the North American station, with warning to the small force of Lord Howe as concerned the motions of Count D'Estaing, was holding consort so far with the former vessel. Availing themselves of this joint protection towards Jamaica, there were in company also the two-decker forty-four gun ship, *Buffalo*, disabled and requiring to go into dock at Kingston, with the (recaptured) merchantman, *Ocean Queen*, bound for that port.

Jury-masts had been got up on the unhappy two-decker, her shot-holes had been plugged for the time, her pumps kept going, and all done that well could be, to cover away the signs of her disheartening and useless losses. It was not without extra toil on the *Astræa's* part, that the *Buffalo* was thus kept afloat and got to rights, during the first wearisome and loathed night, yet a busy one, which threw its veil over the scene left by the engagement. With the morning, and with some words of the most solemn import which the old Vice-admiral signalled every captain to see read, (or, if he had no chaplain, to read himself), the fleet had severally committed to the deep the bodies of their dead—"to be turned into corruption, looking for the resurrection of the body, when the sea shall give up her dead,—and the life of the world to come, through our Lord:" words which bore a more singular emphasis from the lips of Sir Richard Herbert, as his affairs had lately stood. It was

after this that the *Bedfordshire* had joined them with their orders, while the fleet shaped its slow movement the other way. The welcome northerly course had been given; the press of sail, the wrinkling morning surge, the very close of that late sad duty, enlivened them once more; her "salvage" in prospect, from the heavy-laden West Indiaman, comforted the *Astræa;* the gloomy forebodings of Jackson's bluff countenance had vanished; the ample washing of the swell alongside cleansed away her slight share of grief, and but gently rocked the hammocks of her few wounded, with air enough to cool them down the windsails. Then, too, although rumours of all the Captain's supposed good fortune had crept round, yet so far from his new title altering matters, or any sudden riches separating him from the ship, it seemed here he was—under orders to take her off to the thick of the business, where service was active, prizes in plenty, and no more "light-weather line-of-battle traverses to work." His friend, Sir Charles Douglas, was going home, no doubt; and the late signal-frigate still kept up her fashion, by hoisting throughout the day some troublesome flags and balls, to an effect that seemed private between the two: thus bringing recent mishaps annoyingly to mind, as the first-lieutenant's face proved; but showing all the plainer by his looks in the end, that Sir Richard's purpose was made up. All that came of it for the present, in fact, on the latter's side, was his acknowledging a promise thus recalled to him by Sir

Charles, to dine aboard the *Bedfordshire* ere they finally separated. The said promise was not adhered to for that same day, indeed, (which came rather close upon the back of occurrences so serious); but it held good for the next—yes, if at all possible, the very next afternoon they *must* dine together. A postponement not more decent for the *Astræa*, as a sufferer by these events, than strange to have been needed on the part of the Scotch baronet,—who, after all, had merely looked on, while he egged the old admiral to rashness. Sir Charles's turn of mind was already known in a rough fashion throughout the Service. To the rude hearts of oak around, he and his never-failing inventions, his far-reaching schemes and restless scorn of old routine, were as yet still less acceptable, than Whitehall and the Board of Admiralty had ever felt them. He had, to be sure, a gallant presence, and a rare charm of speech; under whose spell Sir George Rodney had doubtless come, so as to raise him now to a prominence above repression at head-quarters. Most likely he might even have views on Captain Herbert, such as alone could account for this eagerness to talk before their courses parted.

Now, if ever the latter had been popular with the crew of the *Astræa*, he was doubly endeared by recent circumstances. As "Sir Richard," his name was flattering to the ship—herself now matchless for behaviour throughout that trying scene. And in fact,—be the frigate what she might,—without his unshaken calmness and judg-

ment of her character, backed to the full by Mr. Holmes's most savage mood, even *her* qualities in common hands could never have brought her out so well. Poor Tom Barrett was gone, no doubt, as prime a topman as ever stepped, [though he could have felt no pain at the moment.] So was little Jemmy Free, a powder-monkey; and in the afternoon, Griff Price and a man named Duncan, ordinary seaman of the after-guard (over both of whom the service was duly read ere sunset): all the others now doing first-rate. Mr. Holmes soon came down in person, and saw to them; the Captain's steward left some little extra delicacies in the head-clues of their hammocks, with a word or two that refreshed them more: and then the first quiet dog-watch, how cool it blew, heaving her easily up to the breeze abeam, with a long slice a-head, and a soft lee-roll, and the stars melting out through the keen-blue dark!

There was now a new and stranger attraction than ever for Harry Spencer, in that deep-seated feeling of his toward Sir Richard Herbert. Were the startling hint of Mary's letter preposterous or not—still it raised curious thoughts to light. Seen by this light, in fact, perplexities vanished, that had used to strike him from the captain's manner towards others as well as him. At the very idea of Mr. Holmes coming to suspect such reasons, his cheek burned in the dark—and *what*, he wondered, had been Kate's own notion? Did the foolish girl so much as guess it? No—no, certainly, such conceit had never been one of her faults, poor thing—

no more than the sheer stupidity which, if she *had* for a moment guessed it, could afterwards have endured the Count! That Count—that Etherege! Again did the recollection of that gentleman mix most odiously with the loss of the detestable *Cornucopia*, and make Harry nervous as he walked the deck—trying to relish the quiet, the breeze, the shadow, to look idly about in the starlight, and hang over the bulwark luxuriously from the top of a rope-rack, hearing the slow liquid rush and ripple. For what could a letter do *now!* Of course he was bound to write, and must begin as soon as he went below, but it would scarce reach by Spring—and somehow there seemed to be a gloomy look-out at any rate for the old firm at Froom-lane, which would get rather a shock from his news, if not earlier. However, by that time at all events, the frigate would be busy enough under Lord Howe up by New York—and Harry had a glowing impression of the captain's look to him in the time of trial, a proud hope deepening in him that ere long, whatever the past reasons, he would earn a real title to get clearer notice, so as to secure it for ever. Meanwhile, there was Little Blakely, who could not possibly steer the barge next day, if the *Bedfordshire* kept company so long; he having narrowly missed crushing by the last spars that fell,—which, as it was, had led to a tumble when he jumped away, putting his arm next thing to out of joint. So that it would go hard indeed if Harry were not sent by Mr. Holmes in the boy's stead. It was odd, but the continued

vicinity of the late signal-frigate had an unpleasant effect on all hands. As to Sir Charles Douglas himself, the dissatisfied feeling, a sort of half-jealousy, was not confined to young Spencer—there was a whisper that he had actually wanted to exchange with Captain Herbert; being, it seemed, authorised to that extent. And, for all that was known, he might still carry the point; so as to leave the twenty-six-gun frigate for Lord Howe's use, taking their own splendid forty-four with him, to show for some design at home. As it was, he seemed somehow to fall naturally into the Commodore style. For although poor old Captain Maule, of the *Buffalo*, was real senior-officer, yet from his ship's state and his low spirits, with his simpler wits, humbler birth, and, at the same time, trouble from the gout, he quite knocked under to Sir Charles—who thus led a-head to windward, keeping up regular squadron-line. Midway came the *Astræa;* astern, the merchantman *Ocean Queen;* abreast of the *Astræa*, to leeward,—as if not merely precious to all, but to *her* care and notice peculiarly beholden,—jogged on like a church the jury-rigged *Buffalo* with her chain-pumps going. Fair enough it might be, and there was every willingness to keep charge of her; there was indeed nothing save a kindly spirit entertained toward her whole ship's-company, nothing but good will in each gang that went aboard to help;—still the whole had some appearance of sharp Scotch caution on Sir Charles's part, if not of a duller Scotch humour: for the sight of the ship herself could

not have been more disagreeable to him than to the *Astræa*. Seen against the stars, she bore at times a most painful resemblance to what might have been conceived the ghost of the *Cornucopia*, when so worn out by Commodore Dodge that he had shifted his flag, used all the cargo, taken the spars for other objects, scuttled and left her. Nevertheless, the sight of Sir Charles's own frigate caused misgivings that were yet unpleasanter—uncomfortable doubts loomed with her, through the vague knowledge of Sir Richard's family matters; still pointing to the Abbé Horne, to their old Catholic creed, and interests that allured straight home. Sir Charles Douglas was of course a gallant officer, a thorough gentleman, full of zeal for the service, whatever else—surely nothing but honour could be meant by his anxiety at parting? On the whole, certainly, his "room" would be better than his company, still Henry Spencer knew enough of the case to get curious what would come of that dinner. He wondered, supposing he went aboard the *Bedfordshire* with the barge, whether he would be invited to join at the cabin table.

"Home?—*home!*" he muttered by himself: "Well, if he *could* be tempted home just now by *anything*—anything earthly, by Jove!—'twould at least *look* bad! They'd say he hankered to the thing. Who knows, too, as he'd get the name of it at any rate, but that once he was on the spot—with the poor Abbé, of course, taking it for granted—Sir Richard might bring himself to think about

the matter? Then, if there *is* any truth in this notion, as to Kate, why——"

Thoughts or no thoughts, even the "first dog-watch" has always to be watched out when fallen to one's share. Other people make the best of their luck, and don't incline to come upon deck to keep you company gratuitously; all the less after everything below, in the way of clothes-bags and chests, has still been at sixes and sevens for the last twenty-four hours, on account of having lately cleared the cockpit for action. It is not lively to hear nothing else but the solitary irregular paces of one old quartermaster's shuffling feet, the cabin-sentry's formal tread athwart these; aloft, the slight creaking of an ill-greased yard-clamp; aft, the indistinct jarring of the steerage-gear; to see only the poop-skylight shining from over the Captain's table, the two men-at-the-wheel like senseless statues against the shadowy verandah that shuts him in, with the buckets hung overhead like flower-pots,—and below, from its cool greenish glimmer, the mate in charge to windward turning off for at least the twentieth time, looking away, and seeing the *Buffalo*, and hiding a yawn at last. Do what you will, one's mind will be busy.

"Queer, too, of Jackson, to have a notion he was to be killed! For my part, I felt quite sure, somehow, of coming through it all. I fancy, in case aught had happened me, I'd have felt desperately astonished to have been *mistaken!* It reminded me, did that first round-shot spinning in—funnily enough—of a tremendous fast cricket-ball.

All the time, though, one seemed to be away off somewhere else, feeling horribly frightened—your eyes didn't appear to have anything to do with your ears, nor the ropes with the spars, nor the very sight of wood or iron with the feel of 'em! What a look the Captain did give, too, when the second one had terrified me for *him!* I recollect Diamond saying something, the time he was so angry at Mr. Burt's roughness, about my looking like Miss Kate—in the swound, as he called it!

"After all, I don't see what right that old coal-mining baronet, his uncle, had with his religion. Or, for that matter, the Admiralty either! Protestant or Catholic, what's the odds here? There's Bob Jackson, or Tom Barrett that was killed beside him, or Black Diamond, we'll say—ay, in fact, here's myself, now—well, I suppose we're all Protestant enough so long as the French ain't? Besides, it's the turning one's coat—leaving the service and all that, and for money, of course! No—no—if the blood of the Herberts were ten times as good, Sir Richard couldn't bear it out. It's demeaning him, to so much as think of it!

"I for one wouldn't go home just now—not for many a long day! Hang it, it's mean—we bound for the colonies, too, with these blackguardly rebels not put down yet! O that blasted *Cornucopia, by George!* No—as long as there's reason to think a timber of her swims, with the very scent of old Dodge upon it—'twon't be *my* fault, anyhow, if I set eyes on English ground, still less Bristol! There's one great merit about Dick Diamond, it must be

owned—the fellow seems to mean the same. I noticed him that curst night, just as that monster Dodge left us in the lurch—and whatever Dick's face showed then, it really wasn't *love!*

"As to Protestants, well—that Count Etherege mayn't be one, but from all we used to hear, he can't be very particularly Catholic. Perhaps he's improved in that respect — people's minds ashore seem to alter so, if there's money in the case! Then is my sister Catherine grown the *same*, that's she's going to marry him? What will my mother say—and even my father?—why, don't I recollect quite well?—pooh, pooh, what's the use of bothering about it, when one don't know the circumstances? Still, though it's about the last place I'd like to be in, it's rather odd to think of Beech Grove this moment—what they're all doing."

Ah, what are they all doing so many thousand miles away, at this very three bells of the first dog-watch? Do events chance to pause there also, for a little—keeping time with the softened swell of action, that eddies round to new ones? Or, heedless of influence so remote, have they merely trickled their slight course, hitherto; still dropping and dropping on, to fulfil what will be? Is there not, mayhap, some passing coincidence of thought among them, guessing how thoughts go in the *Astræa*, and how she fares?

If, indeed, there were the least truth in tales of magnetic sympathy between souls far-divided, with their simultaneous glimpse of each other's scene and case, it should have been proved that evening.

Harry can but conjure up the old avenue, the substantial house, the comfortable room, the most usual group in it; for whom his fancy sets the chairs, spreads the tea-table, begins the talk, and, baffled to do more with it—tires of the task, flies back, and vents itself in a low whistle for more wind. But not the midshipman only, Sir Richard the captain too—writing on at his painful letter to the Abbé Horne, firmly keeping his mind off this strain—still wanders back to it, along the Wrixworth-road to Bristol. Odd it is, without doubt (even to us with the whole narrative in view), that Herbert's thoughts, at no time either imaginative or intellectually acute, should take this special track. He does not know Beech Grove, he knows little of the Spencers save through the squire at Wrixworth Hall, through the young gentleman on board, and through *Her*. Riding again in thought, only, as he had last ridden that road to see his cousin Etherege, he sees every roadside object, with the tower of St. Mary Redcliffe which marked the suburb toward where he was told the great merchant resided; and with to-morrow's settled purpose plain before him (which the visit aboard the *Bedfordshire* can but confirm, be Sir Charles Douglas's design what it may)—all chill and frosty breaks upon him that now lonely road, under a weak wintry moon, at *seven* of the bleak December evening. For, what a careless midshipman may not trouble himself to remember, his captain brings up practically to the surface—well knowing, in the most matter-of-fact

chronometrical way, that under the home-meridian it is already more than two hours later in the night: though with the old moon risen, the Christmas season near, the ground hard-frozen, no doubt, and —it may likely be—on all the naked hedgerows and distant city lies the sheeted snow. When he had passed by it, that previous time, and called on his cousin Etherege, spring was there. Misty and rainy though it then was, and his purpose fixed, too, to forget her by departing so quickly,—he knew now that he had there indulged faint future hopes, which the winking buds of the hedgerow approved; which afterwards she herself fostered unthinkingly, and to which the charge of her young brother had lent subtle pretexts.

Ere the next spring, that track of memory must be washed deep down for him, where no lead-line can fathom! No more England, with its rural lanes—no glimpses of Bristol, however casual—no Herbert Court, not even once for a day, though the Abbé and all should perplex themselves vainly. Nothing but active foreign service till the end; without zeal, without ambition, without plan; without so much as one national antipathy to urge, or even, it seemed, a creed to boast. Honour, a mere word—but still beckoning back, from this dim road to chances yet in his power. He had now to retrace it swiftly again in thought; he had to face fiends along it, and measure devilish temptations there, if but to know he dared not risk them. For pleasant old casuistries of the good Abbé came

up, now rousing some irritation. Of Etherege once or twice he thought, all the more unjustly, yet the more angrily. Of *her* herself—not without calculations which the world, as it goes, might suggest. Finally, of the boy at hand, of Harry, with an indescribable half-shiver, half-glow,—mixed up of the closest kindness and most loathed repulsion, so as to dread the deck where he knew he was, lest they might cross each other there, or Mr. Holmes on some trifling occasion might send Harry in. Not sure, at the same time, whether he would fain get rid of the lad next day [through this chance of the *Bedfordshire's* homeward course], which thus might suit his wishes—or rather, fondly carry him on wherever the *Astræa* went, that they might not part, but be constantly together!

Thus it is, that while concluding the letter to the Abbé Horne—in which he first broke to the good chaplain his long-settled and in fact unavoidable decision—Herbert's struggling thoughts take their dreary outward form. The form of a last journey home at that same hour,—home to the old faded and haunted house of his fathers, to the still unconscious priest, to the rest of his few obsolete dependants,—bearing his unwelcome message. By the Wrixworth-road—turning his back for ever on Bristol, on Redcliffe, whose very lights twinkle out behind; so vivid is the fancy. For a moment, even, there thrills through him one of those strange shivers of the blood, by rustic superstition imputed to the fact of some one crossing the place of our grave. Where was it?

Far away *there:* where she might one day pass gently by the armorial vault under the small chapel? Or much nearer *here;* where he could but be thought of distantly—kindly, as the deep waves soon roll above it? Either way, she would have no dishonour to associate with his name; and Herbert Court will be hers in any case, and her children's. But was it from the road of his fancies, that the passing ghostly impression startled him—or closer by!

He looks up, and out through the wide tropical starlight. Nothing is in sight but the merchantman *Ocean Queen* astern, keeping her place easily at the present rate of speed—abreast to leeward the unfortunate jury-rigged *Buffalo,* whose case requires this patience, though she justifies it wonderfully well—and, at a step to see out forward, the lively *Bedfordshire* leading all, with shadowy bulk against the night's transparency, but quiet lights in her stern-cabins, and broad track of dancing phosphorescence.

It so happens that from the actual road in question, at this very hour, there comes jogging bodily the reverse way, to the Somerset side of Bristol, the old family chaise of Wrixworth Hall. With old-fashioned Roger outside, in his three-caped drab great-coat, powdery from the snow that falls, carefully driving the steady old chesnut mare along slippery ruts, through doubtful drifts, to a bridge that leads toward Beech Grove. Inside, honest Squire Duttridge keeps one glass half-down as they cross the gloomy skirts of Redcliffe, shown by

feeble moonshine; uneasily looking forward for the twentieth time, one hand in the window-holster where the huge horse-pistols are, the other trying to show the time by the chaise-lamps, on a great gold watch he carries. The good stout spinster-lady his sister, well wrapped, fills an opposite corner; affecting to hide all travelling anxieties in sleep, from which at every half-mile she has opened her scared eyes, behind her glaring gold-rimmed pebble spectacles. Beside her—in front of Mr. Duttridge—sits their niece, the Merchant's youngest daughter, Kate herself: and the squire's late experience on the bench of rural magistracy, as retailed *vis-à-vis* to Kate, has not been cheering to overhear; although the rustic ladies'-maid on the same side, huddling respectfully apart, has gaped herself to enviable slumber at that account of ruin to the country, nodding time to each jolt of Roger's. As to the wild spirits of Kate all the slow way till now, they have amazed even her uncle; who of late, at the Hall, has humoured her fitful moods with a more than wonted tenderness.

Chances of being snowed-up by the road have not damped her vivacity, though added to the certainty of very poor quarters at the half way inn. Nor has her rather unsuitable liveliness been affected by references to outrageous poaching; to rampant burglars, footpads, and highwaymen—still less by the secret consideration that the squire himself has been apt to make awkward mistakes in the dusk, that sometimes, too, pistols have proved either empty or double-charged, while he owns his hand to be less

steady than it used. The whole thing, however, is not very flattering to Wrixworth Hall, after her frequent dulness there; and though accompanied to town by her uncle and aunt themselves, to make some stay at the Grove and join old friends (moreover of course Mr. Etherege will join them that evening, which accounts for Kitty's gaiety)—still they have been hurried off a full day sooner, on the ground of a little party to meet that gentleman; who, it seems, is called abruptly away by London engagements. Thus the weather and road setting a drag on the solid old chaise—the time two hours at least behind appointment—still more, certain late unfounded rumours on 'Change tending to throw a disagreeable hue on the visit; which the squire is yet all the readier to make at once—his own quick temper is by no means in its most amiable state. Worst of all, no sooner have the lights of the city swarmed in view, with their quivering reflection down below in a streak of the black river, where the thick of the shipping opens over Redcliffe—St. Mary's clock striking clearly, only seven after all—than suddenly it is plain the girl has not been listening to a word he said, those ten minutes past.

"'Zooks, child!" breaks out the squire, turning an eye on Kate's changed attitude and listless look, "your sparkle quits you strangely, now we're about safe through! I was saying we'd come in for sideboard fare, at any rate. And for all *you've* to heed, I fancy, Miss,—why, in pretty good time for the *best* of the night! None the colder, mayhap you

think, for a little waiting—hey, chit? Used to be so in my time, I know—frosty old bachelor as I look! Come—it's St. Mary's clock, did ye not hear? A few minutes' more patience, and we're under the avenue."

"Already!" she said, starting. "I thought it was but Cromerby church! Surely the way used to be much longer?" She looked out and saw the lights, and leant back again. "I hoped—I thought there would have been more time—I mean, I had only just begun to think of things. An odd shiver ran through me just before you spoke, uncle, which turned my thoughts a moment—pray excuse it! I could almost have fancied some swift rider met us in the snow, but hurried past! You had been speaking of such things, you know. I confess I should have liked to have spent Christmas with you all again—once more, you know, among the old things, there."

"Well, my dear, you will; so you will, of course," returned the squire, with a good-humoured archness. "Without near so much trouble to come over, too—who knows?" He nodded the same shrewd significance — as to Herbert Court — by plainly expressing which, once before, he had roused her indignation.

"I understand you, Uncle Charles," said Kate, with a singular but characteristic steadiness. "No. Never as you mean it, at all events. If I thought *that* case were possible—if it were now likely from any event to be so—I have only to say——"

Stopping, biting her lip, and embarrassed, she looked uneasily round; yet with an obstinate determination, enforced by the clear-cut maturing of her features, such as had lately troubled more than one mind among the circle in which she moved.

Mr. Duttridge shifted on his seat towards her; he put his hand on hers, and lowered his voice as he next spoke.

"My dear Kitty, between you and I, now—come, come—you must agree, 'twould not just be complimentary at Beech Grove, specially to a certain friend I could name, were we to talk of having arrived quicker than we wished! Never mind Aunt Patty; the good soul's asleep this time. It's too late to enter on it all now, but, from what's rumoured—idle trash all, my girl, perfect trash—still, it makes one uncomfortable. D'ye happen to know, is there any particular foreign news of late?"

"Not lately—no, sir. That was just what now ran in my mind, uncle. At least, if there has,—in her few notes to me, Mary conceals it," Kate replied. "I know not why, but of late they have said absolutely nothing on that head. Yet by last letter, while all well and in no danger—indeed everything as it could be wished in the ship,—still 'twas apparent there might be some change. 'Twas not written to me, however. Mary, you know, sir, has that turn to be chief correspondent: nor did it seem fit otherwise, from—from previous circumstances. In truth, it made no difference. I do not care, nor had the least wish. But, considering how

we were once thrown together—I mean Harry and myself—'tis impossible to see——."

"Tut, tut, Kitty—you mistake my drift altogether," interrupted her uncle. "I don't mean from Hal at all, poor boy—though he's a good right to be kept in mind. Never fear, Hal is a boy to push safe through—he'll fall on his feet, I warrant me! No, it's the counting-house news I referred to—but I see you know nothing. Very likely all trash, as I said. I only spoke as one of your guardians. Your father being the other, of course a better judge needn't be looked for, as to keeping a safe hand over your little fortune—and it's delicate talking to him on the point. There's more than *that*, too, invested—as both I and Aunt Patty, there, can attest. But pooh! pooh! no reason to look so scared, I tell you! Broadby and Co. is a house to weather heavier storms. All I wish to say is this, now we're upon it,—for mercy's sake, Catherine Spencer, no trifling or paltering in this matter of yours! My dear child, use your good sense now if ever—and to see that you have it in those eyes of yours, none but a fool could question! Any caprice or whimsicality at present—anything like a misunderstanding or a change—now ye really must excuse plain words, Kate—think what harm might come of it! It's the rumours, it's what the world says and makes of it, dear,—it's not so much for himself, though of course unpleasant to any man of spirit. There can't be a doubt, either, on the other hand, what a solidity his fortune would give to the House—even the mere

credit of it, not to speak of his mental parts! West India estates may be no great thing here, perhaps, and it's understood they're ticklish at present, wherever situated—but for all that, Kitty, it's certain the Bristol firm would be much the better, in these times, of what the Count can bring into it—as I know on the best authority!"

"Mr. Etherege will be very rich—he will soon have much more than *that* implies, sir," said Catherine, quickly. Laying even a stress like that of pride upon the comparison, she added with cold distinctness: "By the terms of the late Sir Ralph Herbert's will, he will obtain the bulk of that baronet's property, both at Kingswood and in the north of England. He will become on the whole, I think, almost what is called a millionnaire. This will have a great influence, I suppose, uncle, on what you speak of. I should hope it would render it all secure."

"Secure! Who can question it for a moment!" exclaimed Mr. Duttridge, overwhelmed at the information. "My good child, you don't say it's *so!* I had thought—well—well—but to be sure you may have reason to know about it. Nothing earthly should tempt you—that's to say, my darling, you'll not let anything, which you'd bitterly regret afterwards, come between this marriage and——"

"I thought, sir," she quietly interposed, "you were aware that I had myself accepted these addresses? At the end of March, when my sister's marriage takes place, mine is to accompany it"

"H'm—certainly—I know. Yes," said the squire, fidgeting about. "But much may take place by the end of March, my dearest Kate. Mark me, your father has said nothing to me—nothing whatever—none of 'em have, my dear. But I see it—in such times as these the firm would be all the better to make things sure at once—a little *sooner*. I mean—that is, nothing but the mere preliminary arrangements. Nothing more whatever, I give you my word! But why mince matters—why, why, what's this? come, come—O Kate, Kate, girl! use your good sense and think it over. I won't press it, though—not a word from me at home, till you give me the hint."

Instead of giving way, and breaking down, white and tearless, into a passionate sob,—Kate Spencer turned a resolute, stubborn face aside, and answered, "I said already, Uncle Charles, that I would do it at the end of March. I am not going to be driven *now*, am I? I thought it was to be all my own choice—no authority, nor persuasion, nor compulsion—all my own free will and wish!"

"You have no notion what the times are—what these terrible mercantile affairs are," pursued her uncle, soothingly, but anxiously. "Every one notices Dudley Spencer's face; it's wearing him out—it's trying his brain too much; your father—that's the danger. The relief of a partner and fresh capital would work like a charm, there's no doubt."

"Mr. Etherege has but to know what papa

requires, in either way," she persisted, quickly, "and it will be done. Mr. Etherege grudges nothing—he is most generous; indeed, there is something very noble about him; then he is aware my word is to be trusted, even though his fortune were swept away to-morrow. It is to be all free will, you know, sir, and my own wishes in the matter."

"Your own wishes, darling—yes, yes. Your free will, my pet—my own little honey, Kate. And *who* would seek to deny it you?" coaxed the hearty old simple-minded Squire. "But womankind never hears reason; a mere month or two—a difference of season—with the man you freely and willingly take! Why, what the deuce——"

"Yes, but I *wish* it to be at the end of March," she persisted, half stupidly. "I don't understand it else. If anything is needed meantime, surely it can be done! Pray, let it rest so, uncle."

The lighted windows of Beech Grove were at hand, through the speckled fog of the wintry evening; the chaise was rumbling up below the furry branches of the bare avenue.

CHAPTER II.

A SNUG HOME-CIRCLE.

FROM the spacious, wainscoted, solidly-furnished dining-room of Beech Grove, almost an hour before, the ladies of the family had withdrawn up-stairs; there composing—by the help of one or two lively inmates, *quondam* schoolfellows of Jane's or Mary's,—a pleasant nucleus for the social party of the evening. For half-an-hour more there had yet been stronger attractions below, —in the rare old port of '68, in the walnuts and filberts, possibly in the classic, the travelled, the political knowledge of Mr. Spencer. These still detained—beside Etherege and their host, with his eldest son, Goscroft—the guest of the house and of the night, that distinguished friend of Goscroft's, Mr. Hubbard Brodie, M.A., Cantab. (of 1778, Senior Wrangler), Fellow of St. John's; on whom the humbler Oxonian looked with a continual proud wonder. The "Graduate" himself

—so Mr. Goscroft was now styled at home—remained content wherever the Fellow thus vouchsafed to be. To him, indeed, were chiefly addressed the few remarks of the latter, who made them irrespectively of all discourse besides; evincing no sensibility to the charm of Mr. Etherege's conversation, and for that of their host, principally betraying some deferential knowledge of his having been a very idle, unclassical gentleman-commoner of Oriel; of his having pulled stroke-oar, too, in the great boat-race between the Universities in the year '50—when old Gough, now of St. John's (the great fluxionist), chanced to be his tutor. Partly so, perhaps, because Mr. Spencer had so far profited by this tuition as afterwards to make himself tolerably acquainted both with the calculus of Leibnitz and Sir Isaac's method,—yet by no means because he had applied such knowledge to practical experiment in science. Of science, the Fellow, apparently, was quite as supremely ignorant as, by his own avowal, he had become indifferent to what are called "the classics." Hence, the talk flagged. Under all the serviceable piquancy of Etherege's contributions to it, over the happy consciousness subdued in his dark eye that evening, and through the affability imperturbable by any slight from this eccentric Mr. Brodie,—there had crept a restless abstraction as the time advanced, as the wintry night was closed out, as wheels sounded dull from the snowy gate, or fresh voices passed up from the hall. The merchant noticed this anxiety, under-

stood it, and met it more than once with confidential reassuring glances.

The whole Spanish forces, it appeared, were on the point of besieging Gibraltar. The Dutch, at length, were in open hostility; so that, with the insolent temper of even so obscure a power as Russia, a general league against this country might ensue.

"It is really difficult to see, I must own, sir," agreed Etherege; "however one may accept your view of colonial obstinacy—what right foreigners can allege—what pretext of justice they can feign—for intervention between them and us. The speech of Lord North is a manly one; the Opposition cannot hope for the least sympathy, except from the mere remnant of a factious party. As to Gibraltar, whoever has seen it must know its immense value to us."

"Sir George Rodney's new fleet cannot now be delayed," said their host, vehemently, but in the best spirits. "It *should* have been ready by this time, certainly; but with the spring, Gibraltar will be safe. Sir George—as I hear on excellent professional authority—is the man of the crisis; a commander whose skill equals his rapidity and daring. In the West Indies, by last accounts, Admiral Byron's strong force would be in time to protect the Caribbees; meanwhile, Lord Howe alone is placed on the defensive at New York; but depend on't, old England, as before, will buffet it out. That France, Spain, Holland—ay, and the

rebels too—will one day smart for this, I feel assured. Justice, Mr. Brodie—to quote from, I think, one or other of those very elegant Greek lyrists, Bion or Moschus, whose fragmentary state we must deplore—'justice being with us, though led captive, there the angry gods will confound tower and temple.'"

This excerpt having been scrupulously and carefully cited in the original, it might have been difficult to understand why a look passed from Fellow to Graduate at the words—so painful as to suggest ideas of some grave moral obliquity committed by Mr. Spencer. His son, Mr. Goscroft, hastened in low tones to remind him, that, despite its Doric dialect, the archaic idiom precluded all reference of this verse to either poet he had named. It was, indeed, unquestionably Pindaric. Mr. Brodie assented by a nod; his brow relaxed again: the two University men resumed the slow dropping of their share in the discourse, or straight athwart it. Of late, at the counting-house, Goscroft had been voluntarily lending his filial aid. His views and prospects lay, however, in the direction of soon taking clerical orders—a purpose suited to his intense gravity, his sonorous voice, his exquisite sense of the becoming in dress, at once rich and sober—if not to the solemn deliberation of bodily, as well as mental, movement, which seemed to mark out the future bishop; or, indeed, to his personal appearance. For the features of a marble bust could scarce have been more regular,

more colourless without pallor, more free from line or angle; and his whole frame corresponded, though singularly fat for so young a man. Goscroft had already been able, at least, to enlighten his learned friend on some secular topics of the conversation; innocently hinting unimagined facts aside to him, or zealously "coaching" him along through unexpected lines of remark, with an amount of superior worldly knowledge—which yet by no means stirred envy on the part of the gaunt and rugged Fellow,—as when the latter had to be "crammed" on the point of Gibraltar, the ancient Calpe, having been once a Spanish fortress, and not an island containing various towns; also that the Dutch still possessed a strong fleet, not propelled by oars, nor likely to fight in the manner of triremes.

"Mr. Brodie alluded, I think, sir," said Goscroft, "to the close of the Peloponnesian war. For my own part, I cannot but hope," added he, in organ-like tones, while he held up his wine-glass and eyed it, "that, like former struggles, the present contest will end."

"Sir," said Mr. Brodie, confidentially,—though his voice was extraordinarily weak and squeaking for so colossal a person,—"I feel *convinced* that it will."

Once more the merchant bowed; his efforts at composure were at any rate quite unembarrassed by the least sense of the ludicrous in such platitudes. There was a keen, grave, intelligent sym-

pathy in Etherege's eye, which helped to sustain his patience. "By the way, Mr. Graduate, do you happen to know," said he, turning to Goscroft, "if the moon rises late to-night; or, indeed, whether there be any? Your uncle would, perhaps, wait for it." Mr. Goscroft was quite unaware, but would ring for an almanack. Etherege looked up to say that the moon had by that time risen, with its light on the wane, certainly, yet sufficient for the road, in that clear frost—the snow aiding as it ceased to fall. "Habits of travel," he concluded, with a smile, "accustom one to note such trifles."

Sounds of ponderous coach-wheels rolled into the sweep in front. Before the hall-door had time to open, Mr. Spencer said, "Your aunt, Mrs. John, of course, Goscroft. Oblige me, pray, by seeing to it, as her health makes this no slight effort for her at the season. Lady Diana, no doubt, comes with her. We shall follow you up-stairs immediately."

It was, in fact, that valetudinarian East India lowager of Mr. John Spencer — the deceased younger brother of the merchant; and Goscroft at once withdrew for her safe conveyance upward. Mr. Hubbard Brodie, though vowed to cloistral celibacy, yet not dead to titled names or opulent associations, raised his vast stature to participate the charge. Then for some minutes more did that fireside corner of the table hold its dark polish snugly in — deeply mirroring the wax-lights, the wine-tinged crystals, the dessert's rich confusion,

like some smooth Venetian tide, that leaves its argosy becalmed—between the merchant and his young friend, his prospective son-in-law.

"A turn for the classics, Mr. Etherege," said the former, after a momentary shrug of the shoulders as the door closed, and a look of relief which evidently referred most to the abstruser mathematics, "seems usually indicative, at least, of gentlemanly tastes and correct sentiments. It is always capable of its practical bearings on active life; and nowhere more, I think, than in the counting-house itself, vulgarly thought so dull and plodding. Goscroft is by nature of an indolent bent; his early disposition to the Church having been fostered, perhaps not altogether judiciously, in view of strong family interest that way: yet, his readiness of late, his present consideration, the very interest he displays, has—has pleased me much. 'Tis something, at all events, to have even this at command. I *did* look forward in the case of his brother—the youngest—whose livelier parts ——But to return," he broke off, steadying his voice; "this will of the old baronet's: true, the most frantic bigot of the Inquisition could scarce have been severer as to his successor in the title. Whatever he or his Jesuit advisers may have meant to effect by it, 'tis clear your cousin Sir Richard, without the most brazen effrontery, cannot benefit by conditions so stringent in favour of Catholicism."

"Their sinister design is apparent," was the

indignant answer. "It is intended that all should at once pass—except the pittance, which decency could not withhold from my poor cousin—to endow the rich French convent in question, and swell the coffers of foreign priests. The mortgages still left on Herbert's reduced estate would twice—three times—devour what they leave him."

"Still, he gets something," said the merchant. "'Twas just what must have been looked for. The legality of the thing is beyond dispute, as recent Acts of Parliament go. The money and bulk of the property fall where they ought, I should say, in this light; namely, to the next of kin—duly fulfilling the terms of the will; failing this, to be sure, to the charities and establishments designated, whether here or abroad. The single bequest to your late mother's convent being in any case quite large enough to attract notice from the Solicitor-General, on its way through Doctors' Commons—why, I think, Etherege, even as a faithful son of old mother Church over the water, you may rest satisfied if you allow *that*."

The young man looked vaguely round the room while these words were spoken; he mechanically filled his wine-glass, yet let it stand unused.

"If I thought—if it were in my power afterwards," returned he, quickly. "In any sufficiently delicate mode, I mean, towards Richard Herbert—but I did not, indeed, see much of my cousin. It is rather from what he so warmly hinted as to his own property, that I speak of him—I mean, as to

Herbert Court in the event of his death, when claims from others might arise. True, since he might not care to return there, it might be now liberally purchased from him. This would, perhaps, afford an opportunity to adjust matters."

"Beyond a doubt—excellent, indeed!" cried Mr. Spencer. "A better idea could not have struck you; and I have a shrewd guess, too, *who* would, above all, agree with me!"

In the olive shade of the young man's cheek there rose a warmer colour: he did not need to guess at the person thus alluded to. "I trust it is unnecessary to say, Mr. Spencer," observed he, "that the question of money is here superfluous: it is irrespectively of this consideration that I speak. Referring to it, however, may one be permitted—let me venture to suggest that on any emergency, dear sir—I mean, should the least occasion arise on your own part—the part of your commercial house, rather—that is to say, at present, already, *to-morrow*, if you will allow me the privilege?"

"It would be affectation to pretend to misunderstand you, Mr. Etherege," said his host, relieving him. "We are men of the world, my good friend; shall I be open with you?" drawing his chair nearer, and participating in the confidential tone. "Yes, I have felt the stress of the times. You may read it here." He pointed to the growing lines of care on his forehead, if not to the well-powdered region above. "In all commerce, you

are aware, there are fluctuations—there are periods of crisis—in which——"

"I am, perhaps, prodigal in expenditure lately," was the hurried interruption; "and I have not yet drawn on Morel and Son. But, certainly, both here and at Smith's, in Lombard-street, I have funds which I shall not need for months. If my bank-draft for three or four thousand pounds, at this moment, Mr. Spencer—even five, I really think—could be of service——"

Mr. Spencer stopped him quickly. "No, no, my friend—not for a moment—again, no!" he said, much moved; indeed, for the few previous seconds, it might have seemed he was actually aghast at the mention of such pecuniary figures as being conceivably important to a British house like that of Broadby and Co. "Etherege—*this*—my dear Etherege——" he faltered, turning away, with a hand outstretched to take his friend's. "How—how considerate to—to me and all—yes, to *all* of us! 'Tis not the thing in itself merely—'tis the feeling, the genuine feeling, thus shown. No, however: what we really want, and that at once, is the aid of the fresh mind—the new energies and the unworn brain."

During the slight pause, his younger companion mused, not looking at him—an eye upon the quivering fire, a hand upon the table, fingering it silently, as on the keys of an instrument.

"For the present, though," added Mr. Spencer,

"I must drop the subject. Such conduct as yours is princely—princely! I cannot express to you how I feel it! I have heard you called cold, Etherege. *You?—cold!*"

Mr. Etherege slowly raised a glance which more than refuted such imputations. "Cold?" he repeated, forcing his swift thoughts back, as it seemed, from the distance. "Yes, I had forgotten the cold; it was too much to expect to-night at such a season. Ah! pardon me—I understand! But is it only on so slight a ground, sir, that your opinion alters—for this trifle—this mere wish to serve you, when you had but to command me in any way? How if you had known during this hour—this afternoon—this eternity of dinner—of words—of wine—what I have felt while I sat here in this room! The last night, too, that I can remain at hand to see her at present—for days to come—in fact, for weeks, perhaps, that must be spent separate—in London, with lawyers, with priests themselves, with all the necessary business of this affair. It must be completed, were it even longer—a thousand times more tedious—were there even a single obsolete prejudice to scare one afterwards from the mummery required; still, think you I could regret it? To be able to pour its results, its splendours—if my cousin rejects them, that is—at *her* feet! Yet, for to-night, it might have been hoped in return—— But it is still early; the road may have detained them; she may, after all, arrive, I think?" The black orbs of his eyes

dilated and glowed out as he looked up; his nostril opened; the marked beauty of his whole face passionately rose above ceremony.

"In my own mind I can scarcely doubt it," was the embarrassed reply. "The squire is not to be kept back from his engagements by a little Christmas snow. To be sure, not knowing you must so soon leave for Town, the message to Wrixworth *was* a little hurried. You must *positively*, then, go to-morrow? In legal matters, of course, there is nothing like prompt action—a great deal of business, too, may be despatched in a week or two, at head-quarters. I warrant me in that case, though, Etherege,—if anything has really been allowed to come in the way, at the Hall,—the most provoked among us to-morrow will be Catherine herself! The blame will be thrown, I fancy, on want of promptitude at home, here. No one is hotter-spirited in certain moods—which so far may be excused her on the score of early indulgence, not to speak of her grandmother's little bequest of late—but at the same time, I assure you, I have had my own annoyance at the occasional tempers on Miss Kate's part!"

"Ay! Were I to tell—but you could not understand it!" came the excited response. "The thoughts—the rage—the desires—the anguish—that have filled me more and more each hour since I came to this house this afternoon! Filled me, said I! 'Tis in *them* that *I* have been plunged—in this hell of expectation, anger, ardour, doubt,

almost hatred. While I sat hearing the meaningless talk, the cursed voices,—saw the detestable motions, etiquette, display! I listened, I was outside, I was away, along the highway and at the country, where she no doubt chose to remain—in her indifference—in her caprice—her coquetry! Heavens, sir! Good God! Think you I have not perceived that she trifles with me!"

"My dear Count! Etherege!" ejaculated his host with eagerness, "I—a—a—in fact, that is, surely—surely—you are mist——"

"Excuse me, Mr. Spencer!" Etherege exclaimed, with an emphatic gesture. "Other men—one less absorbed—would have retreated ere now. With me it is for once a rage, a fire, a possession. It consumes, it urges me on. The more coy, the more reluctant, the more capricious—her beauty has attracted me but the more irresistibly. Did she hate me, it seems to me it would only force my passion beyond bounds, till men nor devils should not obstruct it. But to conquer this caprice, to overpower these difficulties, these whims and humours—till one becomes, as is so certain in the end with such as she, everything—everything—a god, a master! Ah! forgive this plainness, for it intoxicates one to speak at last! Well. I shall persist. Nothing shall now deter me."

"What! The mere nonsense of a girl?" said Mr. Spencer, confused, but with an elevated surprise at the idea. "Pooh! I should hope *not*. Kitty was till of late, no doubt, scarce old enough

to know her own mind. If she married just now, remember—indeed, even as fixed, in spring—she is not of age. Her little fortune brings you no advantage for nearly a couple of years!"

Mr. Etherege smiled disdainfully. "It is yourself who now remind me of its very existence," he said.

"But as the encouragement she herself gave you from the first, Etherege," continued the merchant, more composedly, "was none of my doing—nor her mother's, neither—I thus hold her bound to you. I have never hitherto exerted my authority in the matter—there has really been no need, believe me. As for my word, it is pledged—and the word of a British merchant, I trust, may be depended on." With a firm and dignified look he met the vivid glance of Mr. Etherege. "Trust me, Etherege—yes, my dear fellow," he added, with a soothing familiarity of manner, "take my word for it, Kate really inclines to reciprocate these feelings, the sly chit. Were *you* to keep off or to sheer away—that moment, I believe from sundry little tokens, she'd grow fond!"

"Mr. Spencer," was the husky rejoinder,—"in England, men cannot even imagine a passion such as this. Can it be played off—tricked, think ye—like a thing in a puppet-show? No! I love your daughter—your daughter Catherine, I own it—as the panther of the desert seeks his destined mate! In this I endeavour vainly to be the Englishman I might well profess myself by derivation. She

grew ten times more charming on a sudden, while she trifled, while she coquetted—her wit sparkled the more, her voice, naturally so delicious, perfected itself—there was something, as it seemed, that had developed and enhanced her beauty—so fresh, so youthful, so full of nature—of an *abandon* seldom seen here! It was then, imagine, sir—that in the country, before I so rapidly left it, I pressed my suit—already, see you, *understood!* Twice, sir—twice, Mr. Spencer—with deliberateness, with a coldness, a resolution which I can scarce endure to remember—to think of for a moment without dashing this head against the wall, without seeking some one to destroy!—twice did your daughter virtually convey to me a denial—a wish to hear no more."

Mr. Spencer flushed up and sat erect, looking really angry. "Is this possible?" he said.

"Yet again, as you know," pursued the young man, "Miss Spencer has to others—to you—indicated a sense of the understanding on which I had naturally proceeded—of what she is pleased to call the honour done her. She indirectly implies a return to this position—a tacit agreement, nay, an entire acquiescence in the definite arrangements proposed. She is expected this evening. I sacrifice all other engagements to be here. Well—let this pass—pray allow, sir, for the difficulty of self-restraint—though an hour or two need surely not have been grudged me this evening, before my departure? I am yet more hers than ever! She shall be mine—possess her I must! It is impos-

sible her heart can be all diamond, like her eyes! It will warm—it will glow in return, surely, before life loses its zest—before anything happens to separate us—to shut us both in the earth—the—the dark!"

He had covered his eyes with his hand while he spoke; and now looked up, blinking at the lights, taking the full glass of wine before him, which he drank off and poured another. His host hastened to scout all question on the matter, and to speak cheerfully; with such jocose encouragements and allusions as fathers-in-law elect will mingle with their other discourse. He was thus talking, while at intervals a vehicle or two for the evening circle still turned from the road into the short approach of the house: but Mr. Etherege all at once started upright to his feet, from an intensely listening attitude. His dark eyes glittered; his shadowy face blanched and darkened by turns, till he uttered a joyful ejaculation. "Why, really!" the merchant exclaimed, springing up also: "You are right! 'Tis the squire after all—that was Kitty's voice, too! Better late than never—hey?" The door thrown open, they heard the ladies passing from the chaise, as they hastened up—Kate, as usual, with a meeting chorus of gay voices about her on the staircase. The Squire threw off his great-coat, stamped his cold boots on the mat, and stumped into the dining-room with a shout of recognition, a cordial grasp for Mr. Etherege, then homely readiness for the cold round of beef, and

bluff demands for the hottest-mulled posset of good sound "October."

Formal though the homeliest evening-circles might be in those times, nevertheless, at Beech Grove that night, the meeting was just brilliant enough to yield a general pleasure. Lady Die Fanshawe had most kindly made a point of joining it, considering the agreeable family-occasion; her own modest sedan-chair could not, certainly, in Christmas weather, have served that purpose all the way from the Hotwells side—but Mrs. John Spencer's civil offer had put the visit in her power. The numerous young folks inside the widow's coach had precluded the possibility of her ladyship bringing any foreign protégé *within;* there was, one, however, brought on the top behind. Not, indeed, the gallant Polish major, who had already gone out of view—but a new exiled Corsican of blood as good as his, who taught music about Clifton with a surprising boldness of touch, and artlessly allowed himself to be thus conveyed, when the footman had consented to sit in front for the night. Lady Die had also brought her netting-work in the carriage,—a thing grown then to be the mode in easy family-meetings of the higher tone: she was somewhat less classical now, with a great fan, a spiral head-tire, paint below, a spot upon one cheek, a little train behind her dress. And though the Dean of Wells's stout daughter happened to be there,—by whose presence Mrs. Spencer seemed at first constrained—nay, fluttered at the

Fellow of Oriel's entrance,—yet as the exiled patriot struck the harpsichord and dashed into various songs of his own oppressed island, her ladyship netted attentively, Jane Spencer gracefully strung beads for the hushed young people, even the East-Indian dowager, their mother, through a gold eye-glass studied the patterns of each skirt around. Happily for Lady Die, they had never got so intimate with Mrs. Beauchamp of the Cliff as to invite her yet at all: snug card-tables stood by, and in the whist-room at hand: there was, on the whole, a sufficient sprinkling of quiet spinsters, of heavy matrons, of gentlemen superior to frivolities, to shed round Lady Die the sober British *chiar'oscuro* (to use her own phrase) which she now most affected.

Suddenly, Etherege entered, sparkling; Mr. Spencer, with the jovial squire, came in. Old Miss Duttridge was not long in following; Catherine herself behind,—at the sight of whom among the others, Lady Die Fanshawe rose with a slight scream of pleasure, and swam to her welcome. Mr. Hubbard Brodie, standing, teacup in hand on the hearth-rug, like a Colossus, turned from the fair Jane Spencer in all her classic grace, from the grave discourse of Goscroft, to survey the fresh newcomer through his thin-rimmed spectacles, that gave him so owl-like an air. He even asked the Graduate who she was: her brother ere long leading him to a solemn introduction, as an overgrown Cupid might have led some Titan under the wiles of a dreaded nymph.

On Catherine Spencer's cheek the long frosty drive from Wrixworth had raised a vivid glow, which was some time in dying away to the softer tint of her complexion. For the first time since her grandmother's death she was out of mourning, and looked fashionable in lavender silk with a looped-up skirt behind, and with neckerchief of white muslin folded all over the shoulders into the dress's bosom, clasped there with a mourning brooch. Young though she was, all this made her seem well-nigh mature, as befitted an heiress; her nut-brown hair, too, turned up in powdered waves after the mode just out in Town, with a string of pearls wreathed round the crown, showed all its golden tinge. Listless at first, as if fatigued by the journey, she brightened up amidst a circle of gentlemen; her eyes sparkled with an arch light, as she said mischievous things; it was admirable to hear her voice, and when she spoke, her face was full of life: its beauty, which some ladies had begun already to question, threw Jane's classic regularity then quite into the shade. With what a bewitching mixture, too, of girl and woman, could she say lively things and sit gaily self-possessed,—drawing herself up with consciousness both of her power as a belle, and her position by fortune! As for Mr. Etherege, he judiciously blended, that evening, due attention with a becoming self-control; neither hanging near too much, nor too long keeping apart: his very proper feeling was particularly remarked and praised. This was at the same time

attributed in great measure to the perfect security he felt; as in turn, the colour in her cheek, and the occasional distraction of her manner, were imputed to the happiness of a reciprocal love. The Count was only seen to be noticing her—with his back turned to her place,—in a contiguous mirror; and while handing her to the supper-room, he said a few words in an under tone, with head bent and impassioned look.

"When thinking of the cold road this evening, Miss Spencer," he had thus murmured, with a depth of sincerity which, joined to the ensuing words, brought back all the colour to her face—"I almost despaired of this pleasure—yet one's thoughts could not but bear one out towards it. There was even a moment when, in spite of doubt, fancy seemed all at once convinced you were on the way! I could have sworn that I really met you there! And—and you are *here!*"

Deep she blushed, certainly; he could feel the start she gave: she said nothing in reply, though afterwards conversing gaily enough with him at table.

It grew past midnight. The carriages were all gone. The last sounds on the road had died away. Outside lay the fresh powdering of snow, over house and offices, trees and walls, and all the landscape and city which it gave up clearly to view, under a keen though waning December moon. The moonlight was like a second snow; it flooded the sky; it poured into upper chambers, hiding the

cold. Into the window it came, of the room where Kate was to sleep, with its carefully-fed fire, its extinguished candle, its upturned curtains that showed the white linen to the light. A soft whiteness was diffused there, with blue dusky shades from the moonbeams, where Mary stood, after having helped her younger sister like some willing maid. She bent to Kate, and kissed her, and looked into her eyes. The girl turned away; the two were still silent together. There was something in Kate's attitude, her manner, her listlessness, her sigh, her gaze directed outward into the skiey space —that made Mary linger and look at her, for they had not been together for some weeks. Once or twice Kate had turned to her, as if on the point of confidence; but nothing came; Kate gazed away again.

"Kitty," Mary said, coming near, stooping, and twining an arm round her, "what *is* the matter?".

"Matter?" she repeated. "Why, what should be the matter? Nothing. Tired. Stupid. Ah! what a world! 'Tis all stupid together! Oh! if we could but fly—fly to the moon, Mary!"

"Tell me, Kate," persisted Mary, almost whispering, "do you love the Count?"

"Ha! what a question! The Count?—you mean Mr. Etherege. And why, pray? Why not —what of it, Mademoiselle Sober-face? Why, you look like Sister Anne in Blue Beard?"

"Because, if not, you should not marry him," Mary said, with her grave way; shedding aside,

in a kneeling attitude, her sister's hair. "No, Catherine. .'Twould be a sin to do so, unless!"

"Dear, dear! how mighty good! How pious our Rectoress gets! La!" And from the odd sudden laughing which Kate fell into, Mary almost started aghast. "But is a Count nothing, Polly!" Kate ran on—"and a carriage—and—and possibly, perhaps—in the end, you know—Herbert Court! Think of that, Miss—*Herbert Court!* Herbert Court, you know! You shall ride in my carriage, Mary, and stay long visits with me at Herbert Court!"

"Oh, Kate!"

"You are prejudiced against Mr. Etherege, I know," said Kate, composedly. "So was Harry—Harry hated him most absurdly. By-the-by, I wonder where Harry is just now, poor boy! Looking at the moon, do you think? But my father has no such prejudices, I can tell you—do you know what he said to me to-night—in the library—just before I came up-stairs—as if I ever had meant to jilt any one, you know, Mary? As if his very life depended on it—as if he had seen something dreadful in it—and papa—my father—were pleading to me, not I to him! If he'd been angry—stern—harsh, you know—I—I could have resisted; but—heigho! well. The day is firmly fixed, then. This day three months, Mary. In March. March, of all months!"

"Kate! Kate! are you mad? What *do* you mean?"

"Do I love him—hey? Why, *of course* I do, child? Such a question, forsooth! As much as a *man* ought to be, I suppose! Quite as much, I fancy, as one can—for a gentleman—one of the opposite genus or species, or whatever is the phrase, you know! At least I shall—in time. I must do! There! Well? Go, dear—good-night—I'm really tired."

"Tell me one thing, Kitty—answer me one question?" said her sister, even solemnly. "It has crossed my mind once or twice—is it possible you have ever had any previous—to speak plainly, that there was ever anything between you, you know, and——"

A hand was quickly and firmly put upon Mary's mouth. "No more questioning—you seem quite, to-night, like a mere point of interrogation. I won't answer any more. *There!* Good-night!"

And Mary went away wondering how a fortune and admiration had turned her younger sister's head, so lately but a girl's.

Still Catherine Spencer sat and eyed that perennial disk of dreamers, poets, lunatics, and lovers, where, freshly bright as ever, it grew smaller in the heights of the sky, from behind a gush of rays. Till at length she shivered in the shawl she had wrapped round her, drew down the blind, and retreated to a fitter place for the weariness she had mentioned.

Fain, on the wings of a dove, does the heart fly from war, hardship, absence, peril, and the home-

less elements, to find a moment's repose. From amidst home, comfort, company, fortune, friends, prospects, it will yet take the reverse flight with as eager a longing; perhaps more blindly, vagrantly, and without conscious reason, even because of the very caprice that often plays about a happy fortune. It would fain be at rest some other where than here. But it must come back, at best, with the olive-twig. Art alone, winged with imagination, floats on to breed pleasant thoughts from it all, that may return some day in flocks to the windows.

CHAPTER III.

THE *BUFFALO* PROVES MORE THAN WORTHY OF CONSIDERATION.

WITH another day's steady sail to the north-west, the small squadron under Sir Charles Douglas made good way up the Spanish Main for the windward channel; where he meant to leave it safe off Port Royal in Jamaica. Except the very leaky state of the injured forty-four on two decks, there was no ground for continued anxiety on his part; and as to this, its real weight was shared by the *Astræa* frigate alone, whose help sufficed by the afternoon to get the two-decker in a condition above danger. In regard to hostile cruisers, those inner waters were evidently for the present as clear of them as was reported by sundry coasting craft and stray merchantmen with which the squadron spoke.

During the earlier course of the day, indeed, a slight occurrence varied its tenor; with some extra

interest for the *Astræa*. The same little innocent neutral schooner was made out to leeward, which had been left to its own resources on the night of the *Cornucopia's* abduction from convoy. Stoutly plodding away with her home-freight for the distant Baltic, she was easily known by the quaint old Scandinavian build, ere her Danish colours answered the *Bedfordshire's* inquiries. The last-named frigate, bearing up to speak, sent a boat aboard, and readily obtained all the information thus available. Two days previous,—on that immediately subsequent to the action between the fleets,—the Danish schooner had been passed by two vessels about a couple of leagues to windward; a large merchantman and a hermaphrodite, which she at once recognised as her late pretended consort in company with the largest of the two British West-Indiamen. They were under all sail, making an exceedingly fast course, and took almost no notice of her, seeming to steer for the western passage of Porto Rico: she, on the other hand, had naturally done her best to observe them by the help of glasses; and saw that the *Cornucopia* took the leading part, quickly signalling her smaller consort when the latter inclined to own their previous acquaintance,—indeed bearing aloft the broad pendant of a Commodore (speckled and striped); while both carried the same new-fashioned colours at the peak. Each had now also a long brass pivot-gun on the forecastle; both appearing to be very full of men, many of them mulattoes and negroes.

The details of this account were given on board the *Bedfordshire* in the afternoon, when the Dane had dropped hull-down astern; Sir Richard Herbert having come, as appointed, to dine with Sir Charles.

In respect to participating in the said visit, it had chanced that young Spencer's wishes were realised. For, whether owing to the first-lieutenant alone, or to some special reason apparently rising on the captain's part, the mere accident of Little Blakely's slight disqualification for duty that evening served his messmate's turn, so as to allow of Harry's taking his place at the yoke-lines of the barge's tiller. Nor only so, but it seemed quite a matter of course, in the *Bedfordshire*, to ask him to join with another young gentleman, from her own afternoon watch, in dining at the cabin table. There the party was large enough, indeed, to throw every fancy of secret influence or private persuasion out of view. But the minor part sustained by the late signal-frigate in what elsewhere ensued,—however incumbent on the youth to explain subsequently,—must meantime yield before the *Astræa's* share in it.

At sun-down, after the busy day's help to the two-decked forty-four, the last gang of carpenter's-men, riggers, and pumpers, came back to the forty-four-gun frigate; reporting the *Buffalo* easy to keep sound for the night,—in fact, fit to have steered for Plymouth or New York. Her own indefatigable second-lieutenant, an Irishman—but the

hardest-working of men—came straight on board soon after in her yawl, along with the fine old gentlemanly purser: the one to ask after a missing hand, suspected of having skulked off to the frigate; the other, to see an old friend, his brother-purser there. The two ships were not a couple of cable-lengths apart, the other frigate not farther a-head, the merchantman *Ocean Queen* little more distant astern: the gun-room officers received the visit most heartily; below, the mid of the boat was cordially entertained by the cockpit mess; with the boat's-crew, the men on the main-deck did likewise, the yawl itself towing gently under the lee counter. For a brief interval, considerable jollity prevailed; some sort of tacit license was allowed; the easy look-out of the dog-watch in a steady breeze was all that either ship required on deck. Up on the short poop of the *Astræa*, the keen eye of Mr. Holmes himself, as he thoughtfully moved to and fro alone, sufficed to have kept from inattention the dullest mate afloat.

As seven bells struck (half-past seven of the dark tropical evening), Little Blakely, with his feverish arm still in a sling, came up from the sweltering cockpit, where the *Buffalo's* mid yet lingered,—to breathe the air, and cast a glance besides at the lighted stern of the *Bedfordshire;* under which, even as he looked, Sir Richard's barge began to haul alongside in readiness for the return aboard. Deeply dusky was that second dog-watch, and the light breeze had scarcely fanned the day's heat away

yet, under the high bulwarks of the frigate: he got up higher with some trouble, but enjoyed it the more, and saw abeam of him, to leeward, the old *Buffalo* jogging along as usual, like a house—with jury-masts over the stumps that had been left her, every sail spread that she had room for; the sharp clang of the pumps just ceasing again, some outer stages for the caulkers and carpenters still hanging alongside, everything looming lumpy through the dark. But at each lazy forge she made into the wash of the swell, it was pretty to see how her shadow broke up in the long twining uncoiling ripple that swam against her, like a fiery salamander or a sea-snake going the other way, with a rush of sparks into burning foam; the *Astræa* herself, too, lightly lifting on it with a slash, and a surge from her weather-bow, that mounted again under Little Blakely's very eye as he hung over, in bubbles and bells and seethings of green ocean light. Little Blakely always felt it very pleasant to be at sea now, and was thinking of Sindbad the Sailor, and Robinson Crusoe, how fondly his poor mother gave him those works on successive birthdays, without the intention to charm him toward the Naval Service—also wondering whether there was any chance of the *Cornucopia* ever being seen more by Harry Spencer: when it oddly occurred to him that they must be cooking hot supper at rather an odd hour on board the *Buffalo*, to judge from certain indications to his olfactory sense. That faculty being in him such as junior mids strongly develope toward

cookery, while the leeward draught of the breeze was but weak, and a slight smoke appeared to him to be oozing up in the *Buffalo's* shadow, through a lower-deck port or scuttle—Little Blakely waited to see clearer. At length being certain, he hurried to inform the mate of the deck.

Doubtless, the bloom and aroma of culinary smells was some years gone off for the young master's-mate now concerned; so that however ready his eye, he had not been so quickly warned of anything thus suspicious. Even the nose of the first-lieutenant, though so sensitive to every track of action, and even considered flexible to the impulses of his thoughts, could boast no peculiar instinct physically. While those of a snuffy old quartermaster and some briny look-out-men were callous with time. Hence there was at first a disposition to scout the fancies of the small reefer, who did not belong to the watch, and had no business there; in fact Little Blakely was always getting up unnoticed on hammock-nettings, rope-racks, or carronades, coming out of unexpected places, and having privileges nobody else had—whereas on the present occasion, what with the breeze, what with the dark, he could not, for a little, again exactly swear he still smelt or saw as he had said. Unfortunately, too, as he pointed out the obvious smoke, this time seeming to come from near the funnel over the galley—trying once more to communicate the scent he felt, to Mr. Hunt, who eyed the two-decked *Buffalo* with the

general disgust,—the last half-hour-glass of the dog-watch was being turned by the sentry behind the wheel.

"Eight bells out, sir?" said the quartermaster, touching his hat as he advanced.

"Strike it—pass the word to call the watch," returned Mr. Hunt. "There's two of her own officers aboard here—they were going off at eight bells—run down and let 'em know, if you like, Mister Blakely, that the purser's staying too late. Frying raw pork on the sly, no doubt? Hark-ye, though, young skip-jack, don't forget to remind Mr. Burt that he relieves the deck—and I'll thank ye not to make a slop-bowl of the cold salt junk, if there's any left in the beef-kid."

The clanging strokes of the binnacle-bell were almost simultaneous with those in the other ships; shrill breath went piercing through the silver calls of the boatswain's-mates, gruffly echoed below the hatchways, with hoarse cavernous resoundings fore and aft, inarticulate save to practised ears—

"Aho-o-oy! The larboard watch, aho-oy!" And all else was absorbed in the trampling rush to the ladders, the swarming issue of full half the crew, the passing of the words, exchange of stations, relief of wheel and guard, and quick sharp references to the watch-bill for the night: though on the quarter-deck Mr. Holmes's attention had already been aroused toward the *Buffalo*, in spite of her equal vigilance, which but a little more confusedly and slowly kept time with her companions.

Her second-lieutenant and purser were now at once taking hasty leave of the friendly gun-room below; the former officer, very mirthfully and loudly, considering his late fatigue or his present uncertainty of footing—at which Mr. Holmes was, in the circumstances, disposed to wink. At the same time, by the side-lanthorns in the frigate a-head, and the group at her lee-gangway, it was evident Sir Richard's early return on board would soon enhance the delicacy of matters. "Really I do think," he began to say, rather sharply, "Lieutenant O'Connor had better be told that his boat, here——why, bless me, what's wrong? Good gracious!"

For, suddenly there could be heard a fresh stir and disorder rising on board that ship, out of the movement caùsed by the relief of the watch: it spread like a tumult, and swelled into a disturbed noise and abrupt medley of shouts, little resembling aught in a man-of-war; till the whole upper deck could be seen, even at that distance, to swarm with her people, some even in their shirts. Scarce had this attracted notice, ere, with a rapidity as yet inexplicable, the entire fore-part of this their luckless consort was involved in a cloud of smoke which wreathed up from the fore-hatchway, and poured from the foremost main-deck-ports.

"By ——, she's on fire!" "What the —— are they about!" "Whereabouts is her magazine?" "Why don't they smother it?" "Heave her a-back!" "No—no—keep her dead before it." "Port!" "Starboard!"

It was thus that, in a sudden agitation like her own, the whole of the frigate's officers for a few seconds rushed together, or hither and thither, swearing, speculating, with the addition of the *Buffalo's* second-lieutenant and purser,—shouting, ordering, looking for boats or men, trying to direct both their own ship and their unhappy consort, in one breath and with an utter want of all system: while Mr. Holmes, the first-lieutenant, gesticulated during those moments in vain. With still more unexpected suddenness, the two-decked forty-four now made a sheer nearer, almost broaching-to—instead of which, however, her sails still serving, she kept steerage-way and broke up to windward across the *Astræa's* course, thus passing between the *Bedfordshire* and her; so as fairly to separate the small squadron. As the *Astræa* was thus forced to back her main-yard and heave-to, in the same manner stopping the merchantman *Ocean Queen*, astern of her,—a spectacle of utter confusion as well as danger was presented. From the crowded lower-rigging, it could be observed that the *Bedfordshire* alone passed on coolly to leeward, till a position of comparative safety was reached; when she hoisted lights, rendering it obvious how both her captain and Sir Richard, standing conspicuous side by side, designed that the chief help should be afforded, namely, by regaining the *Buffalo's* weather-quarter, closer to the scene. The smoke, stifled for a minute or two, could be seen that instant to whirl forth again and pour up, rolling high against the faint starlight, and shutting

all their further directions from view—a mighty phantom, that first leant before the wind toward the *Astræa*, then dilated round her, as if to envelope both in the same hideous folds. The splash and hiss of water being dashed on the fire aboard the *Buffalo*, the clang and clash of her pumps into the fire-hose, the hubbub of her men, and the contrary orders of officers whom the smoke bewildered—all seemed to drift down to the very bulwarks of the frigate.

"Keep fast all—tacks and sheets hold on!" cried Mr. Holmes, in his most peremptory voice. "Beat to quarters—the first man that moves to a boat again, shall be run through on the spot. Starboard the helm! Starboard! Let her fall off and wear round, Mr. Courtenay—brace in the after-yards—gently—gently! Now the head-yards—haul over the jib-sheet—so, sir!"

"Meet her with the helm, meet her, quartermaster," adds he, drawing breath once more, with a countenance that shone relieved in the binnacle light; as they cleared the smoke and came smartly to on the other tack, again right to windward of the distressed ship. No sooner had they done so, than the smoke flared white and lurid, and immediately burst into dull flame from the fore and main hatchways and foremost main-deck ports; throwing all these in one moment into a distinctness the more startling because of the huge volume of vapour, here smoke, here steam, that blew careering and writhing aft into the dark overhead; while the frigate's men saw each other's faces

flickering to it, and the tops of the swells sank from it with a ghastly glitter between, and a washing sound that went terribly to the heart, if but because so much water gave no help. Directly afterwards, however, the motionless *Buffalo* was got off the wind again—then set right before it; after which the exertions used by her crew got somewhat the better of the flames, smothering them in, and turning the vast column of brown smoke altogether into clouds of white steam. By the help of a strong party from the *Astræa*, the powder-magazine was then got at and effectually drowned, all the boats hoisted out, and progress made towards the seat of the fire, which was thought to have begun most probably in the sail-room, or rope-store. There, the ship's recent damages had caused a great deal of work that afternoon, with much stowing away of gear from the wreck of the shattered masts; besides that the boatswain and sail-maker were both missing.

But all at once, with tenfold fierceness, and with a fury that set all efforts at defiance, the flames burst up again like an explosion, driving every one from before their rush of smoke and heat; this time, too, flashing out immediately in a sheer torrent of red fire. It leapt up in a hundred flapping tongues, that glowed clear orange before the breeze, as they licked up the foremast, ran like snakes over the fore-rigging, and seized the fore-sail and jury-fore-topsail with a wild, sudden flutter of the canvas, as if a stately bird were struggling in the

air against a crested and glittering serpent. Beneath, it roared and crackled; the play of the water on it only made it hiss and fume for a moment, then blaze wider athwartships; till the whole burning fore-rigging and yards, with the jury-mast itself, fell crash amidst it, throwing the ship once more into the wind. After that, there was no further hope, though the clash of the pumps still lasted as long as the men could stand at them; with the passing of buckets, the thump and crash of axes, the whole stout-hearted voiceless straining and heaving of hundreds of British seamen to carry out the rapid words of their officers—who were themselves among the foremost and most active, encouraging and preserving coolness, without the oaths, without the harshness, without the brutal bluster and browbeating, which at other times were prevalent in that age. The fire rose furnace-like and raging, almost smokeless, against the night, which seemed to darken round its glare; it shot sternwards along either bulwark in a sort of crescent, even while the men in the main-hatchway and on deck were striving against its front—till at last, with an abrupt rush and blast which well-nigh enveloped them, it came blazing together in a single spiring volume, caught the main-shrouds and all the congeries of ropes, with the launch and booms; driving the crowd of seamen, marines, and officers in a body to the quarter-deck, blinded, singed, breathless. While it was with the utmost difficulty that those who had remained at work

between-decks to the last, could scramble or be dragged up by the after-hatchway, or out of the stern windows.

The old scarlet-faced Post-captain stood on the poop, sword in hand, with his cocked-hat on, and his puffy cheeks more puffed than ever in his firmness,—planting his right foot on the plank before him, gouty though it was, and swearing a horribly defiant oath (oaths had become a second language to him) that he would be the last man to leave the ship; and that every living soul aboard should be told down into the boats before him, that he might see who the ——s were, that would not stand a court-martial. And while the fire lit up the whole main-deck below, tearing at the hatchways, flaming out of the foremost upper ports on either side, and mounting united about the two black stumps which began to kindle—rearing over and reaching sternward after the crew, with a fierce, ravaging, devouring sound as of trampling and struggling demons, till the very nearest ports on the main-deck could be seen from the frigate to glow red through the chinks about their close-shut lids—while this increased behind, so that the heat grew intolerable, did that old Captain persist in exacting discipline to the letter. There were few captains more hated in the service than Captain Maule,—though in *this* case the feeling regarded a gentleman by birth, and no mere coarse tyrant raised from the forecastle. He had so dead a heart to anything like mercy, or the sense that common men had life like

his, or that any right existed or mattered where he had power; and he had done cruelties and injuries so ingeniously base and brutal from his youth up, making his officers resemble him, if they would curry any favour,—that vows of full settlement had often and long been sworn against him in secret. But he was no coward at any time, and when he was seen so stubbornly fixed, with the fire near enough at last to scorch his back, and his ship crackling to pieces almost under his feet, not a man scowled at him, or chose that moment to defy his authority, which he was losing over each as they passed towards the *Astræa* and her consorts.

Happily, the wind had been falling lighter till it almost ceased; the after-hatchway and poop doors being battened close, and the flames bursting out less rapidly about the stern, there was time for all to embark in order, helped by the *Astræa's* boats, as well as by some from the *Bedfordshire* and the West Indiaman. With a side shining to the fierce light, and groups of faces glowing ruddy in it, the latter frigate had hove-to as near as was safe, on the burning two-decker's larboard quarter; her spars gleamed metallic before it, her canvas hovered aloft like dinted brass with bloody stains, and the swell washed to her bends as if it mingled blood with wine, molten treasures with the water's glitter and the deep tint of the ocean. Now it glared up, roaring and rustling in intense vividness, till everything was distincter than by day within its lurid circle, backed by blackest shadows in am-

bush; a shower of sparks went scattering from it, and the roll of the sea lifted the helpless bulk of the hull to a side, with a slight plash and edge of froth that were very mocking-like, as boat after boat came heavily towards the frigate. Behind all, away on the horizon, blacker darkness had been creeping up the while unnoticed; until at length the first-lieutenant of the *Astræa*, when the worst of the suspense was over, turned round, shaded his eyes from the conflagration, and saw, by the disappearance of half the stars, that what he had thought smoke was likely ere midnight to be rain —rain in tropical quantity, with no doubt a squall of wind towards the close. It was only too late to do good to the *Buffalo*.

For the *Buffalo*, there blazing at a quarter of a mile's distance, no one seemed sorry after all; so soon, at least, as the crisis was over, and the boats began to get safely laden and leave her in succession. Her magazine being fairly drowned, and the *Astræa* close at hand, it was even done leisurely; she blazed and burned away like a grand light for the occasion: and although almost nothing had been saved, which was the cause shortly of some curses, still, the very men of her crew, as they got on board their consorts, seemed rather to turn an eye of grim satisfaction at her than to feel regret— a rare thing with sailors. The old post-captain, but half-an-hour ago the senior and superior of Captain Herbert, with authority over the frigate— now about to become a mere guest—might leave

her with some emotion, if emotion or regard for wood should chance to touch his bloated old body, more than such things did in him for human flesh. But not so her good-humoured Irish second-lieutenant, who hated her for the captain's sake and her own; nor even her first-lieutenant, a melancholy long-faced man, with an anxious look,—who, having had his arm dislocated in the course of the struggle, came in the first boat along with the others, that the limb might be rightly set. This was done immediately by the frigate's surgeon in the gun-room below; where, fatigued as the two officers were with their late exertions, they stood for a little at the mess-table to join old Mr. Chuck, the master of the *Astræa*—condescendingly patronised by third-lieutenant Dalby—in a needful can of stiff rum-grog. Mr. Chuck had known the *Buffalo's* first-lieutenant also, in former days, and hastened to console him with rough respect. Above and alongside sounded the stir of another boat's reception: the two stern-windows, and two quarter-gallery ones of the gun-room, caught a light from the burning vessel; although, as only a corner of the latter's stern was turned as before to the frigate, her blaze itself was not directly visible. The gun-room lamp hung above the table, and threw its light on the *Buffalo's* first-lieutenant as he mechanically pushed away the second supply of liquor, and leant his head forward over the table, disconsolately supported by the uninjured hand.

"Come, come, Mr. Dods," said Mr. Chuck, with

coarse sympathy, "never take on about the matter. Ye've done what man can do, an' few 'll say, I reckon, as she's a craft worth grieving for!"

"Bedad, sir," remarked Lieutenant O'Connor, the Irish officer of the two-decker,—who was a tall man with a raw-blue face and large bare jaw, middle-aged enough to have been respectable and the father of a family, but with the mind and manners of a school lad, and by this time a little the worse of drink, which he took every means of adding to while he spoke,—"bedad, sir, quite the contrary! An old jade! A blundering, foundering old tool-chest, sir, begor! that was only worthy of the Admiralty and Captain Mau——ahem—no neems, however. I neem no one—here's to all of us, gentlemen, and long may we live! Be me sowl, I tell ye, when the fire drove us aft from the pumps, Mr. Dods, 'twas the happiest moment of me life! Oo—oo, ye owld harridan!" And he shook his huge fist towards the fore gun-port of the room; through which, as it was half raised for air, the red glare was visible, now directly, now in heaving reflection on the water. "Bad luck to ye—there's as fine a pair o' riding-boots frizzling at this moment down in yer ill-conditioned bowels, in the larboard lower-deck after-berth, as a gentleman might wish to wear!"

"The last boat has just left her all safe, with Captain Maule on board," said the well-bred Lieutenant Dalby, who was looking attentively out of the port.

"Never fear him!" said Lieutenant O'Connor, bitterly jocose. "By the powers, sir, he's safe to eskeep both foir and wather! The rats were the *first* to leave, some of the men say—and I hope there's no unlucky ropes about the frigate's side here, with a running bowline in it, sir, which would be somewhere about the hoighth of a risk to Captain Mau—— But no neems—no neems, gentlemen, excuse me—I neem no one! ha! ha! ha!"

The mirth and irony seemed ill-timed to others, but Lieutenant O'Connor enjoyed his jest little the less. The frigate's old Master continued in a groggy rough-spun manner to administer consolation to the first-luff of the two-decked forty-four; for, on the one hand, there had been a good deal of previous sociality that evening, and in the other case, there was now a deep reaction of energy, joined to bodily pain, along with the sense of ruined professional prospects, and the thought of a court-martial.

"Hist!" suddenly said the gentlemanly Dalby, the frigate's third-lieutenant, holding up a finger as he still looked out into the dazzling glare of fire and water. "What the doose—eh? what was that? Lightning? Thunder? So it is, though."

Against the pitch-dark sky beyond the burning ship there had flashed out the reflection of a light, scarce noticeable for the blaze at hand—followed by a sound which seemed, amidst the confusion of plash and oar-fall and hollow thump against the side, with the breeze-like rushing and rustling of

the flames, to be the rumbling mutter of distant thunder. Again it happened, and again, in quick succession, till it ceased. As for the perishing ship herself, the fire had rather gathered force than slackened within the hull itself; but above, it had shrunk down into ardent tongues and blades of the intensest flame, burning clear, fierce, and lambent, as if within a calcined shell with shattered edges; the heaving water had somewhat sheered it round towards the frigate's stern, although the lashed wheel and the unconsumed mizen top-gallant-sail had sufficed to keep it as yet nearly end-on. But all at once the entire mizenmast toppled down, fell across the burning quarter-gallery, and went in hissing pieces alongside, as if it had been a pipe-stem; when, the wheel-lashing being no doubt burned also, the hull began to slue round: drifting, however, to leeward with the direction of the swell, which took it gradually away from the *Astræa*.

"Psho! psho! Mr. Dods," persisted Mr. Chuck, more familiarly than beseemed his relative rank, perhaps, but with the freedom of liquor and old acquaintance; "sit down, sir, sit down, and drink a drop—then turn in! A reg'lar marked craft she were—I knowed the moment I first clapped eyes on her, one-an'-twenty year agone, she would come to no good. She were most terribly looardly, and church-built, likewise she looked wonderful like a craft which would steer wildish without her mizen-topes'l, in a gale! Am I right?"

"Mr. Chuck," said the lieutenant, hoarsely, as he lifted his common-place, lengthy, rather simpleton face, from the support of his hand—looking white with his various troubles, by the lamp-light above him—"Mr. Chuck, sir, you don't know what it is to lose what you've just got after working for it years and years—I hope you don't, Mr. Chuck—I hope you don't, with a wife and five children dependent."

"Pluck up, pluck up, sir," repeated Mr. Chuck, vaguely, for the dozenth time, leaning over with benevolent smiles close to his old friend, and making an oracular gesture with his hand. "They'll acquit you, sir—they can't but acquit ye, sir, or I'm—I'm—*blowed!*"

"It's not the first time I've seen a court-martial," replied Lieutenant Dods, hopelessly. "Acquitted or not—clear or foul, and clear I am as the babe unborn, of course—still I'm a finished man. They'll acquit me of everything, I've no doubt, but they won't *employ me.* I'm not like Captain Maule, though far be it from me to speak disrespectfully of Captain Maule, Mr. Chuck—I've no interest. I'm not a man of family. Where's my patrons? Who's to back me?"

"Apply for the Revenue," said Mr. Chuck, firmly. "Apply to the Revenue—it's profitabler. They can't refuse ye a cutter, look—and here are you your own master, near home, prizing smugglers. Smuggling is livelier every day, I hear.

If I had a lieutenant's commission, I'd ha' applied myself. Lord! what liquors you comes across, in luggers!"

The lieutenant's anxious features had brightened a little. He seemed a man easily convinced, and said, "Well—I should not wonder! Do you think, Mr. Chuck, the Revenue people would be open, without interest?"

"*Think!*" repeated old Mr. Chuck, self-sufficiently, "I don't think about it, I knows it. It's all interest there too—but harkee, sir—hark ye, Mr. Dods, you're a old friend o' mine, and a old messmate when I was your superior officer, an' I don't mind letting ye into a bit of a secret." He stretched over again to the lieutenant, putting his mouth and hand near the latter's ear: "I've a neffew which has two votes in what they call a borough, and he gives them both to a——"

His communication was interrupted by a shout from Lieutenant Dalby at the gun-port. "Hallo!" he had cried, "what's that? By George! it's a gun!" The call was almost simultaneous with the loud report of a cannon close at hand, which brought the Irish second-lieutenant and another officer or two running to the port; so that they were in time to see a puff of luminous smoke expanding in the fiery glare from the *Buffalo's* nearer bow, then lazily curled upward in all rainbow tints above the smouldering stump of her bowsprit, past her uncouth figure-head, that came out lividly distinct with its great ears and horns. The hull was still

slowly sheering as it floated off, burning furnace-like within, but as yet to all appearance externally solid, save that the top-sides were gone, leaving only ragged edges and black ribs above: in the midst still stood the stout stumps of the fore and main-masts, charring and glowing on, with some of their iron hoops red-hot. It had turned by this time almost broadside-on towards the *Astræa's* starboard quarter-gallery—while under the frigate's side, and up into her gangway, went on the thick of the bustle in taking the burnt-out crew on board, receiving their captain, veering the many boats of both ships astern, and hoisting them in on the other side.

"It's a lower-deck gun," said one of the officers just come below. "Down in the bow-port," said another. "None of the main-deck ones had been left loaded, it seems, then?"

"Damn it—another!" "Perhaps they're shotted?" "Of course." "By Heaven, she'll fairly rake us!" These were the chorus of alarmed exclamations that broke with the same breath from the group. One or two rushed towards the hatchway to give the alarm on deck, which had already been taken. But the breeze had for the time fallen so utterly dead, exhausted the more rapidly by the very fire itself, that the frigate had neither motion through the water, nor even steerage-way to turn her round lengthwise to the two-decker. Indeed it was doubtful which might be worst, the greater chance of being hit at all, lengthwise, by aimless

shots—or that of being traversed from stem to stern by any single ball which might happen to strike end-on. But the quickness of a true seaman was shown in Mr. Holmes's adoption of the readiest expedient, by ordering all the boats forward to tow on a line which was passed a-head in a few seconds; so as to give his own bows a cast at once to larboard—the reverse way to that towards which the *Buffalo* was visibly turning. For a few seconds this placed the frigate directly stern-on to the two-decker's full broadside; but the unprimed guns were going off only in slow succession, as the iron heated in each at intervals of a minute or two,—and it was the best choice of an alternative.

The first-lieutenant of the doomed two-decker had risen up and stared towards the windows, with as wild an aspect as if he had forgotten till then that his late ship still floated and blazed. The frigate's Master, leaning towards him yet, had only turned his head in a hazy, leering way, to see what was the matter. Distinctly visible to the quarter-gallery casements now swung the stumpy length of the two-decked forty-four, a mere black shell full of fire, upon the lurid glitterings of the swell; dark amid her own blaze, she rose and heaved like a huge lamp, while the frigate already began to cast from her by help of the boats, and of every stitch of her canvas. Only for a few startling seconds did the group below in the *Astræa's* gun-room see the lower broadside of the *Buffalo;* the two guns already fired on that side had knocked their port-

lids off, leaving the empty openings like furnace doors, through which was shown a quivering, glowing heart of red fire and flame; the others still ranged along with closed lids, each squarely edged by a chink that let the fire glow through, while the quarter-gallery windows were lit up as in a light-house. For a few moments it glared full on them, right opposite, and another port-lid flew open with a fierce flash and roar, disclosing another glimpse into the raging body of flame within, as the beams, bulkheads, and decks, with the inside timbers, fed its chief intensity; there was a terrible and hideous effect, too, in that unmeaning hostility which no hand of man directed, as if hell rose with fiendish malice from the abyss into her hold—yet no damage seemed to have followed; and as the frigate's boats pulled at her bow, the wild spectacle appeared to revolve away, with another flash, another explosion, till the dark night-sky and darkly gleaming water filled its place. The lamp-light seemed to regain soothing power over the gun-room; there was only a reflected glare outside.

"Mr. O'Connor," said the first-lieutenant of the *Buffalo*, turning aghast towards the Irish officer, "*you* commanded the lower deck battery in the late action. Were the guns left *shotted?*"

"Faith and they were, I'm afraid, Mr. Dods," replied the Irishman, lightly. "The truth is, the enemy slipped past us while we loaded—and I'd have seen 'em unshotted to-morrow."

"It was an oversight—of *mine*," said the Lieutenant. "But no matter—it's too late to find fault. The risk's over. It's so well, too, we had the frigates in company!"

"Why yes, by St. Patrick!" rejoined Lieutenant O'Connor, joyously, "and there's a load off my heart, that I've had ever since I joined that old harness-cask—sink her!"

The master took his can in hand again, and stooped confidentially, as before, to Lieutenant Dods. "As I said," he resumed, "I've a neffew ashore, which has two votes for a Member of Par——"

He was in that attitude, saying that word close to the other's ear, when a round twenty-four-pound shot from the two-decker's next gun came crash through the bulkhead from the other quarter-gallery of the ship, taking Lieutenant Dods right in the middle, and cutting him through as he stood, with a mechanical convulsion which hurled the mangled remains across the mess-table—while at the same instant it smashed one of the old master's arms at the shoulder, and whirled onward through another bulkhead, leaving him, with a yell of agony, writhing on his back. The ball passed diagonally through the ship to an iron-clamped knee timber, from which it glanced, then severely wounded a marine far forward on the main-deck by a splinter from a stanchion, and was brought up by one of the foremost guns, beside which it dropped. The first-lieutenant of the *Buffalo* was

dead, and could have suffered but an instant's pain. The frigate's sailing-master was borne along in great suffering to the sick bay, had his arm amputated, and for the time recovered; but never so as to be able to do duty again at sea.

The frigate had, immediately after, forged clear of her ill-starred consort's death-throes. She as yet knew nothing whatever of another disastrous occurrence of the night, taking place a little previously, and fraught with results to herself of the most painful kind. The boats of Sir Charles Douglas's smaller frigate, and of the merchantman *Ocean Queen*, had done their part to the best of their ability from leeward and astern; they were still thus engaged, profiting by the immediate directions of Captain Herbert from the *Astræa's* barge, which at length passed on its return to Sir Richard's own ship. While on its way in view of the hopeless two-decker's lee-quarter—under the lowest window of which there was still a small air-scuttle or two untouched by the fire,—from this direction it was apparent to all, that some poor wretch had managed there to survive; though unable to get out and drop overboard as had been done by more than one of his drunken accomplices. It was thought, by the sound of his mad yells, to be the missing boatswain, a very big-made man, and likely to be in just such a plight—no favourite, though, and in fact the real cause of the whole tragedy; besides, the boats were more than full enough at the moment; then, moreover, he was as sure as man

could be of hanging if he escaped, and being always in the "horrors" after a booze, was supposed only to want to drown himself—which, if he had but tried to get out feet-foremost, he might have done well enough. Hitherto, nothing of the last alarming addition to the terrors of the scene had been so much as imagined—the upper guns of the main-deck simply heating red without further effect; so that the captain's barge never hesitated to sheer round and pull back athwart the blaze to leeward, hailing the wretched creature the while. The first explosion from the lee lower-battery, no doubt, rather staggered them; no one even suspecting yet, however, but that it was a single blank cartridge, by chance not drawn; the wad, perhaps, having struck the water. The burning two-decker's hull had by that time taken a list to that side: in consequence of which, the second ball from right amidships now glanced off the swell, hit the barge fair in the bilge as she mounted, and sent half her timbers flying, with a splinter and a gurgle that left all swimming next moment—oars, thwarts, sternboards, and men together, certainly, and with plenty of spars and wreck conveniently afloat near hand. In the fierce light, too, all was plain to the *Bedfordshire* and her boats; few minutes passed, ere both those who struck out stoutest, and those that clung to oars like young Spencer, were all safe from risk of the sharks. To Sir Richard himself, it was plain that the chief danger had occurred: by the flow of blood from a splinter wound in the

arm, with the limb's powerless state, and consequent exhaustion; his life being, in fact, due to Jackson and Black Diamond, who had been in the boats and swam to his help. Something, too, had been done by young Harry's previous effort on his captain's behalf. Harry had been nearest at first, and was seen to catch an oar for himself: one end of which he had evidently managed to push below Sir Richard's arms, after snatching by his hair when he suddenly seemed to sink; and this they both must have done next moment, had the lad not forthwith taken his chance of floating unsupported. A boat from the *Bedfordshire* then came up; young Spencer did not say whether he could swim, or, indeed, anything more on the question,—but was silently taken in after Sir Richard was secure, and conveyed back with him to the *Bedfordshire:* to which latter ship, as she hastily closed on that side, the alarm was still confined. The seamen were picked up severally; by that time, the miserable boatswain's case was at an end.

In half-an-hour further, the *Buffalo's* charred remains were quenched in the element she had floated on, for she sank, and almost burst asunder in the act like a rotten cask. It had then begun to rain. It rained a deluge. The lightning flashed at intervals through it, the thunder rattled and resounded in the mighty spaces of the sky, as if in strange echo of human doings. Captain Maule, late of the *Buffalo*, had taken a great deal of wine also by that time, and came out to look at the

weather, to feel the rain, to curse and blast it for not coming sooner. To his first-lieutenant's poor relics, covered with a flag, or to the awful occurrence itself, he had paid so little heed, that it was with difficulty Mr. Holmes had restrained his disgust, or concealed his indignation and contempt. Mr. Holmes was all the less patient, as he had, of course, learned the cause of Sir Richard's prolonged absence. The truth was, for that night, Sir Richard could not be transferred to his own ship without danger; the *Astræa's* surgeon went at once on board the *Bedfordshire*, to join his colleague there. To-morrow, doubtless, if Sir Charles felt bound to part company so soon, the medical advice might support him in allowing his friend's removal; if not, he might see need to accompany them to Port Royal. Young Spencer remained also, none asking why.

The wind came on and lifted the perpendicular rain aslant, like levelling spears; with a hiss, and with a rushing roar, a howl, a shriek and moan. The night was black around—pitch dark—so dark, that no man could see his own hand, even while they got the boats in. It was as if every light in earth or heaven had gone out. But the water swelled, the wheel gained command, the sails filled, and the squall drove them north-westward together on their course.

CHAPTER IV.

ETIENNE ETHEREGE (OF UNDERWOOD, KENT), ESQ., TO HIS FRIEND, FLORIAN, VICOMTE DE LA TREBOUILLE.

It is undoubted that the epistolary correspondence of Etherege, always a mode of intercourse suited to his mental turn, must latterly have become extended beyond the track of a youthful Parisian friendship. From other sources there is reason to believe that, while held in town by various legal affairs, he thus anxiously kept up his relations with the Beech Grove household, through frequent though brief notes—sometimes almost solely of a business character—to Mr. Spencer at the counting-house. From among the general circle of their Bristol acquaintances, Mrs. Beauchamp, of Beauchamp Cliff, had of late been most conspicuous in chaperoning the fair *fiancée*, to whose brilliant prospects it was thought she had originally conduced;

prominent from the first in Etherege's interest, Mrs. General Beauchamp undeniably invited his correspondence, and to the last boasted of his matchless letters, as doing justice to her conception, to his character, to the sentiments of the few who had appreciated it; though delicacy, of course, reserved the proofs, if it did not even forbid their preservation. Herself one of the handsomest women of fashion of her time, with everything freely settled upon her that the old general had left, and scarce yet in the least *passée* to the keenest glance,—not to speak of her figure, style, spirits, knowledge of garrison or even camp life, and her magnificent self-confidence—Mrs. Beauchamp of the Cliff, a lady who could "do anything" that mortal front might well "carry through," was more than sufficient test of the attributes here referred to him.

Vindicating the merit reflected on herself by her own fidelity to his friendship—to wit, his *constancy* —she was bold enough to confess, that even had she been so inclined, Mr. Etherege's attachment was of that passionate sort to exclude all ideas of rivalry; however skilled she might be in the ways of the world, nay, however apt to be piqued at such devotion to another. Nothing could have been more Platonic, so far as she was concerned, than their animated correspondence; which, at the same time, she had thought better to reserve, even from certain eyes that might have seemed entitled to a peep. Of his morals and good heart she said afterwards in this view, that a French lady of high quality, un-

known to her by name—indeed, writing affectedly under that of a shepherdess—had certainly discovered his address, desiring merely to be allowed the same friendly privilege as Mrs. Beauchamp. To which, after due notice on his part how matters stood, the said lady still persisting with the most generous sympathy and interest on that very ground alleged by him, he had then frankly agreed. The privilege, he owned, was *his*, since Madame de Sévigné herself scarce wrote more sprightly, more easy, more entertainingly than this lady—when disengaged of a rash passion. Again, of his wit: "In regard to matters of learning and philosophy, Mrs. Beauchamp could not pretend to judge with my Lady Die Fanshawe, who, poor woman, had of late grown somewhat too much of the devotee for *her*; but 'twas known the Honourable Horace Walpole had oftener than once spoke well of Mr. Etherege by letter, as to having met him in company,—the letters being understood, it seemed, for publication." Then, moreover: "Notwithstanding some ill-natured scandal about sceptical notions, as they were called, her Ladyship at least was the *last* who should have called his unfortunate creed in question; it being notorious enough *who* had used always to talk of her philosophers from the Continent, that professed to keep by the old Pope from convenience, or only for want of a better—*faute de mieux*." Finally, in regard to Lady Diana Fanshawe ever having had a single letter from Mr. Etherege, her own horrified denial was thoroughly

corroborated by Mrs. Beauchamp, who, to her dying-day—a very dull day, indeed—averred, "That if my lady *had*, it would long ago have appeared in print, by way of help to the Methodists with their paltry tracts, headed by wretched woodcuts of horrible crimes; or, possibly, among the notes to those fanatical verses, oddly styled poetry, by Mr. William Cowper." This was long after, though, when the war was done; when Horace Walpole, Lord Orford, faded peevishly away; when Cowper's spirit of homely delight in Nature had begun to work thoughtfully throughout England.

The only letters from Etherege's hand, which have been recovered, are three in number; addressed to his enthusiastic young friend, De la Trebouille, then serving with the allied army of North American Independence, in the rough field of the Carolina States. All of these (as has already been stated in reference to the first of the series,—in which we have an account of the early tragic fate of Don Victor d'Etterega de la Castra, the writer's brave but unfortunate father),—were found among the papers of that aforesaid gallant young artillery officer; who, soon after receipt of the last of the three, fell at the second siege of Charleston by a British force, when that place was taken by assault. From the rude possession of camp-followers, doubtless, to that of coarse store-keepers or vulgar commissaries, these slight relics of a most touching friendship appear to have passed, until eventually conveyed to the sole right-

ful claimants, after the noble house of La Trebouille itself had been utterly extinguished in the volcanic fires of the French Revolution. Some vague conjecture of a profound family secret, well worth buying, had evidently arisen through sundry epistolary allusions open to misinterpretation from strangers, joined with the fact of their having been written in French; a motive, at all events, securing their preservation. The *second* in order —dated at a period in the occurrences, only marked otherwise by a brief pause—is now given at the most suitable place. By the *third*, the present narrative will be fitly closed.

"At the Hotel Northumberland, Northumberland-street,
"Westminster, London, 1ᵉˢ de Febʳ, 1780.

"Again and again thanks, my Florian, for these exile-like thoughts of thy renegaded Etienne!

"From amidst those forest-bivouacs, those irregular détours of a guerilla warfare, those Indian files of night marching on the trail of the backwood, as thou styl'st it in their own barbarous idiom —impeded by such difficulties as I see here described, from the natural incompatibility with allies so impatient, so ungrateful—from their mean and sordid parsimony, their unscrupulous solecisms on all martial rule, their militia-like customs, their savage followers, the ambushes, the tomahawk, the tree-fighting—from amidst all, there still can burn the clear flame which shone beside mine in Paris!

"How turbid its twin-image *here*, Florian—how

wavering, though ever ardent! So mixed, so fed from apart, so open to the very street that vibrates past —as to reproach one with egotism by comparison! *Florian's*, on the one hand, how self-forgetful, how transparent in its desire for confidence, in its patience to hear all, its generous interest—*this*, on the contrary, how eager to avail itself of these, how full of its own secret glowings, how secure, comfortable, busy with arrangements and prospects, perhaps, in one word, English! The proof of *thine* was indeed welcome beyond expression. It could not have been more opportune. I hasten to respond to it—but, let me own, just because there was no other letter to-night that could vie with it, because there was none to write with any warmth at all (unless I dared trust myself, as yet, with a pen that would *burn!*). I had almost said, it is because no business could be done in the City to-day, save that of churches and chapels—because the shops are not lit to-night, nor the opera or theatres open, no 'receptions' invite out, nor has any one called for me—because for a little, too, it is needless to see more lawyers, to have interviews with priests, or to sign papers—and for a short time again, to-morrow, when the stage-coaches of this Puritanic country are allowed to travel again, I may return to Bristol!

"Yet no, my friend—it is not, it never shall be so! There seems, only, in this suppressed emotion —this overflowing of the heart—an irresistible ingenuousness toward every side, an anxious sincerity

above all to *you*. Have I already forgot to *tutoyer* you? Well—it seems fantastic at best. The reality needs not to be affected, where it exists—we both of us live among Englishmen—would, indeed, that it were within reach of each other! Why, too—*why*, let me entreat in passing—do you persist, however nobly, in supporting this causeless provincial struggle, against an empire which must triumph in the end! How be surprised, that I can less than ever share your enthusiasm? Independence—liberty—republic—emancipation! And do you return with these watchwords to *France*—or rather, must I at last picture to myself the accomplished Florian a shaggy recluse in his backwood, seated under his logs, pleased with his rustic squaw, surrounded by his unruly progeny, feared by his savages and his negroes alone! You do not know England, Florian. I myself did worse—I misconceived it. Arriving here under the fierce impulse of a hatred to the whole race, doubtless excusable in the circumstances—I find innumerable causes for respect, much to admire; not now for a moment to breathe the name of what is most exquisite, most peculiar to this country! You, unfortunately, led away by your very interest in their welfare, have but seen them distorted beyond the Atlantic—and you detest them! Canada might have been forgotten—a little ago the chivalrous French heart was brave enough to wish to imitate whatever was English—is it not this rude North American confraternity that may soon be so dis-

gusting, as for ages to embitter the two peoples against each other? I am older than you—pardon the entreaty, the anxious counsel of friendship, when, instead of agreeing in your wishes, I venture to utter mine. And they are, that your annoyances may, ere too late, urge you all—or rather the young Marquis himself at your head—to discover some mode of honourable extrication from this revolt, and of safe return to Europe.

"Sinçe you do not at least disdain, Florian, to be curious as to the issue of my search in a family matter, whose motive and whose progress have before been confided to you, I hasten to relate it. A mistake more complete, yet more natural than that I was at first led into, it would be difficult to conceive. My father-in-law elect, M. Spencer—in the highest sense a British merchant, honoured, *respected* (a position, in effect, the more impossible to convey to a French nobleman, because surrounded by the English colonists of North America)—Mr. Spencer, nevertheless, had united, to a personal character in many points admirable, some national and professional peculiarities which a stranger was apt to misapprehend in the outset. It was by mere accident that I discovered the existence of an ex-partner from his mercantile house, who had long previously ceased to take any active share in its business—a coarse, low-mannered, sinister individual, yet an affected devotee; marked out to clearer suspicion by the fact that he too, but at a period corresponding exactly with the circumstances in question, had been abroad in Jamaica."

(Etherege here proceeds to recount incidents, which, both from this letter and other sources, have already been detailed in full.)

"The wretch's identity, either with the murderous spy, Coguel, or the cunning English agent of Broadby and Co., if not with both in one, was beyond doubt. The chief fear was, lest from some circuitous motive of reckless desperation, of covetous obstinacy, or of his pretended fanaticism, this Ffloyd might prefer ruin and exposure by law to fulfilling even the too-advantageous terms imposed upon him in the circumstances—if, indeed, still able to perform them. However, in the juncture at which his base affairs of trade had arrived, these were too critically situated to allow of paltering; an unaccountable, stupid fidelity to their demands, rather than greed itself, appeared paramount with this miserable ruffian—so broken down, so uncouth, so perplexingly influenced by the strangest superstitious motives, despite all his bloated remains of a surly pride and athletic vigour. Adolphe, my mulatto servant,—mutilated when a boy by '*Coguel*,'—during the interval dogged from the background this man Ffloyd's unaccountable movements. True to the time for which he himself had obstinately stipulated, the miscreant appeared at my inn at Bristol, bringing the proofs recovered, as he averred, from the Portuguese villain in his concealment in London—namely, the stained and faded certificate by the chaplain of my father's vessel, and the imperfect remains of the naval journal, where, inscribed by Coguel himself,

as lieutenant at that time, the record of my mother's marriage was duly visible. That Coguel's zealous enmity had prompted him to obtain these, and doubtless his malice to preserve them so long, Ffloyd allowed, in corroboration of my own belief: the seal of the priest, the attestation of the witnesses—on the ship's book, too, the emblazoned stamp of the royal arms of Spain—authenticated these sufficient documents, which legal examination has since verified. The man's confident engagements to trace out the surviving witnesses themselves, were time given him—even to produce Coguel in person, if required, and protected by legal authority—all this forced me for the time to lay aside any sterner purposes. Could I even have trusted to Adolphe's unerring senses, his mute but quenchless memory—in a case where age, habits, perhaps intentional disguise, must have altered this man—yet, at the same time, supposing *him* really the Portuguese assassin, to detect would have been at once to ensure his fate. For, a mere hint of this suspicion to the mulatto, would itself have been dangerous. Adolphe knows nothing of the precise motive for his own watchfulness. Must I confess, that, apart from my direct interests, there was for a time the idea of deeper revenge!

"At the sordid price of his mere readiness to compensate for a crime implicating himself—at the money which had been promised in return for his success in doing justice—his trembling hands clutched, as if the sum were all-important; with

professions as to the abject poverty of Coguel, and assurances of speedy repayment on his own part! So far from relenting towards the doomed and hopeless wretch, I but proceeded in accordance with the fate betrayed in his eye—with what was predicted by his gloomy figure, his sullen attitude, his equivocal manner as he in vain tried to understand, without inquiring, all the motives on my side. I meant that this gold should sustain him longer on the rack of his mean trade, still fostering the infatuated desire to carry it on, to pour new resources into its abyss—in the vague idea, evidently, that we required him, or rather, that he must be essential to this prodigal young Etterega in the distance, the rich son of that very Don Victor, in whose destruction he must at least have taken some part! Evidently, there were no shifts so base, no expedients so desperate, to which he might not be urged between such alternatives. Even attempts at new crime could be augured from his obstinate pertinacity; if driven to bay, watched, led on to full disclosure; yet denied further bribe, threatened, impelled to useless flight. Were it so at any moment, every scruple must cease—he then at once identifies himself and re-incurs his guilt. While the duty remains sacred, it were really better to be despatched in silence, without danger of reviving those old slanders against my father's name, which the planters of Kingston once alleged, and which the freedom of legal tribunals here might allow. His escape could not be so hasty or so

secret, but that the single word to poor Adolphe—not yet breathed—would seal his fate, however distant. I do not bring the mulatto with me here—he is left in Bristol. As it is, this Ffloyd evinces no disposition of that kind; appearing, rather, to prosper in his affairs. I already know too much of them—of the general state of things around him, too—to believe so. At present, there, even amongst some of the merchant princes, the struggle to avoid deceit on the part of such traders—to maintain the credit they shake—to prosecute the commerce they should support—is, to use the authoritative words of a correspondent of my own, 'purgatory itself!' The numerous frauds, the endless subterfuges, the very robberies and audacities of late prevalent elsewhere, as I am informed, seem peculiarly rampant in that neighbourhood; nor need I strain your wit, my friend, to infer from what a darker source *they* must therefore proceed. I assure you, all my own conceptions of the fabled Erebus of the poets were exceeded by the horror of this sugar-baker's glances, at our first interview. Yet after our *last*, on the other hand, he anxiously obtained my address in London, in order that, during my absence, he might write to me, if necessary. In spite of which, I have not heard from him at all. He *prospers*, it appears? It is curious! What if the inconvenience be saved, ere long, of publicly proving Monsieur Ffloyd one and the same with Broadby's vile agent—with Coguel—with the murderer, the *pirate*, if you will! Adolphe him-

self might well spare him unpunished—to this deeper plunging down the steps of Avernus, this real Pandemonium. In view of prospects so dazzling as mine, indeed—so celestial as almost to make one giddy—the truth is, I would fain forget revenge altogether.

"Does it surprise you, then, Florian, to read language a little savouring of the mythological, and from such a pen? Strange to say, it is through questions approaching to this character that I have been of late compelled to view the result of my search. As the obvious consequence of it, at first sight, fresh fortunes of the most brilliant character are thrown into my grasp; and that with an abruptness which would have been inconceivable in any other country than England—where the scruples of conscience are almost whimsical. Anywhere else than here, I might at once have said, These fortunes devolve immediately to my possession, though by the most unexpected chance, by a mere legal technicality. My maternal grandfather, as you are aware, was English—the exiled youngest brother of the Herbert baronetcy, whose actual occupant died lately, leaving by will an accumulation of wealth to his nephew, my cousin." (Here follows a recapitulation of facts which the previous narrative renders superfluous.) "It is not only, my friend, that the prevalent opinion of one's country must furnish the standard to honour. We are the children of circumstances—our very sentiments take their colour from what surrounds us.

In France, I admit, this decision would not have cost me a thought—with the same readiness with which I should resume the family name, I should also have joined in the ecclesiastical ceremonies which my grand-uncle had undoubtedly an equal right to stipulate. Unlike the new baronet, my cousin, I have never implied any desertion of the family creed transmitted in either branch—at the same time, whether fortunate or not, these priestly rites have hitherto had neither allurement nor repugnance for me. It is simply, that I have not required them. Still, singularly enough, the situation has its emphasis—the idea of an alternative impresses one! Already I have sufficient fortune—it might probably be increased by its own development, were I covetous of wealth—I do not need more, indeed. No, Florian—unless an enlightened philosophy justifies the step—unless, too, Reason could approve its subsequent continuance—then, nothing shall weigh with me to take it. Not even the power to lavish magnificence round the adored one!

"Believe me, there is in England something indescribably calculated to give gravity to the thoughts! This matter-of-fact turn, this mere practical intuition of theirs, their very dulness in regard to the finer and more subtle considerations, have a tendency to infect one. It is even difficult to avoid being led too far by the rugged honesty, the earnestness, the promptitude—under which, amidst an infinite variety of creeds, an all but

unanimous conviction inspires this singular race, enabling them to tolerate every outward eccentricity in each other. The arrogant assumption of a peculiar destiny, a special favour from history on their part—I had almost said, of a perfect coincidence between the two terms, Man and Englishman—at *this*, of course, we can afford to smile. We, who have so often enjoyed together those innumerable stinging sarcasms and relentless assaults on the Jews, with their similar pretences—by which the prince of Reasoners, as well as of poets, has annihilated *that* imposture! Yet can you imagine it really the case, my friend, that fate has in vain marked out these islands here, small as they appear—with their command of the globe, with their tempered climate, their commerce, their soil, their forests, their mines, their machinery, all their natural security, their boasted freedom, their hive-like industry, and restless energy, and imposing confidence? Is it probable that the sun of empire has culminated, in the revolt of half of our raw North American Colonies; the mere casual aggregation of a mob-like force against our sway! Setting aside the other vast provinces we possess there—setting aside our rich West India Islands—there is the immense dominion of the gorgeous Eastern Moguls, begun to be conquered at this moment—there is Africa, which the Dutch now expose to our attack—there is even a whole newly-discovered continent toward the Southern Pole, on which the enterprising and lamented Cook has

lately planted our flag—*ours!* Yes, Florian—it is not because I am unduly allured by fortune, it is not merely from the ties of blood, not even from those of passion; but one must choose between opposite pretences to justice, and my reason approves that of Great Britain in this contest. Spain itself appears to me to have had but the flimsiest pretence for commencing hostilities on the other side. Remember that *there* my noble father was forgotten by his sovereign, forced by neglect at home to the obscure and distant service in which he met his death, and that even of him I knew but little—that my mother's French rights only availed her in a convent; while her father, my own indulgent grandsire, was English. And it is to *his* acquisitions, to the very claims he had resigned, that I now owe all. As a traveller by habit, as a cosmopolite in theory, I might boast impartiality in my choice.

"Our ideas are perhaps rightly modified by circumstances. The chameleon alters according to contiguity; but the plant—blanched under a cover, chemically tinged by mineral influences,—grows only amidst the daylight to its natural hue. We used to imagine, my dear Florian, that happiness, that virtue, were variously balanced throughout the world—here on one side, there at the other—that the Turk or Hottentot enjoyed advantages to compensate for those of the Parisian; that the case of the boor, the serf, or the mechanic, was thus adjusted to a surprising nicety of management. The antique ages, the childish life, thus pleased our phi-

lanthropic sentiment. In this scheme, I venture to think, if it be not sacrilegious—that the incomparable Voltaire overlooked a hypothesis, which to his genius might have become pregnant. On the contrary, it strikes me that there is an unaccountable favouritism in nature, almost terrible to contemplate, unless for some end. One or the other is the more fortunate, it would seem—one or the other is the more *right*, surely? We at least hit upon a tide which carries us to our goal. With more leisure at my command, I shall in fact pursue the inquiry further.

"Necessarily, of late, I have been brought a good deal in contact with a gentleman whom I had before seen, on first arriving in England—M. Osborne Smith, as he prefers to be styled in society; otherwise Father Joseph, the family chaplain and confessor at Kingswood and at Norham, country-seats of the late baronet, my grand-uncle. A Jesuit, indeed, yet at the same time liberal in his sentiments, perfectly educated, a polished man of the world and a traveller, himself of good birth —scarcely a priest, having the special dispensation from the tonsure and clerical garb—he formerly underwent dangers of no trifling nature, from the stringency of the older English law against his faith, but more especially against his order. In early life, he is well known to have proved the sincerity of his zeal, among the proscribed and secret missionaries to the Chinese. The immense learning of this man, the startling ease with which

he anticipates and classifies every thought, every character,—joined to his extreme candour and yet his absolute devotion to an idea—have, I confess, astonished me. He is calmly familiar with agencies, with movements, now at work throughout Europe, whose nature I could myself have guessed, but of whose inevitable and appalling results neither you nor I could have dreamt for a moment. Some of these M. Smith has pointed out as obvious, others he has confided to me. On the one hand, it were useless for the present to harass you with their alarm; on the other, I am not at liberty to risk chance disclosure to strangers through a letter.

"That there is some degree of anxiety, through his means, to secure an intelligent auxiliary, if not an important proselyte,—may be assumed as likely, nay, natural in such a country. The shades of ecclesiastical difference are not here marked, as in France; they range through countless degrees, from the verge of insanity to the limits of the most tranquil reason; yet there are few indeed, who, practically and for convenience' sake, do not unite under some one of the innumerable professions of belief, each with its dogmatic functionaries. The latter may be regarded, when sincere, as the expositors of a supposed thesis or assertion, which it is their part to vindicate. Should they severally fail, all the worse so far as they are concerned; for some other, to whom the votaries pass, all the better. That there is truth somewhere, seems unquestionable; and if so, Englishmen have surely taken the best means to

find the pea at last, under thimbles so numerous and puzzling. Seriously, Florian, were I to make a guess for the time, I should be disposed to say that it rests somewhere under the grave beaver of Father Joseph. His own brain has many cells, one of which at least I had hitherto failed to include among my logical categories. Reason, according to him, has but little to do with the question; it is here rather to be opposed. In every mind there is an open place for the unknown, the irrational, the authoritative. Of this place—of all these places among men—the true Church is ready, is willing, to take charge. And that without filling it with incredible propositions, since these remain the Church's affair—what she requires is, in her department, to have them acted upon. The Father shrewdly inquired of me the other day, whether I had ever perused all the Jewish writings of which I spoke—in fact, whether I had read Voltaire himself carefully throughout, without knowing that he was a zealous theist? This overwhelmed me with confusion, for he quoted passage after passage—he showed me them. The error of that great man was, he said, not that he believed or acted on this, if it were so; but that he argued it. When dying, he was persuaded to take the mass; why not, then, during life? Unless, it was true, either from shyness (*mauvaise honte*), or because he wished to usurp the clerical functions he assailed!

"*A propos* of such things, and—of dreaming. I had a dream very lately, Florian,—doubtless, from

its oddity, the result of such topics. You remember the handsome, rich, and still more lucky German we used to meet in the Palais Royal, whom we always believed to be really a Jew on various accounts—if only because he scoffed at Voltaire as old-fashioned, timid, reactionary: though few would have ventured to hint this motive to our gloomy friend from the Spas, with his dangerous reputation. Here, again, I find myself hitting on the curious influence of motives over our opinions. Well, turning in broad daylight from the crowded Strand, to look on at a respectable billiard-table along with an acquaintance here, I suddenly found myself in company with the Baron d'Heilbach, who, as usual, was taking advantage of every opportunity to game. The same saturnine, cynical, impassible gaze was fixed on me; with which, scarce deigning to recognise us, he used as it were to drink in, alike dully, any news, any *canard*, any generous sentiment, gay speech, or enthusiasm about virtue and honour; saying afterwards, you recollect, that it refreshed him, that it was pleasant, that it almost revived the zest of vice for him, which, to his view, was the sole use of morals. I well remembered that the last time we had met, the Baron d'Heilbach spoke thus in a sneering manner, asserting that invariably every one resisted the vice which did not suit him, but only for the time,—to enjoy it the more, subsequently; virtue itself being thus a dream. A little out of temper then, I had shown it; he passed my words easily, with an in-

difference the more provoking, from his fame as a duellist. Late that same night, in the street, I met him clinging to the last company to be found; he was already in his half-stupefied state, and would have gone with me anywhere. At that time, keeping me apart a moment, he said strangely, 'Count, if you could take out my heart, it would be quite enough to satisfy you—like the planets struck off from the sun, every one is so inwardly—only mine burns out before the time, and is finishing the business. Still, as you will, my friend.' There was then something pitiable in the expression with which he ground his teeth and left me. The affair of our poor jealous Marquis occurring directly after, I was driven, as I before told you, from Paris, and on the track of my late inquiries.

"Happy even in sleep,—perhaps, from some brief but rapturous vision,—I now thought I looked down on him with a magnanimous feeling. As if it had been but next day, or rather next instant,—in place of giving him my card, I said calmly: 'Well, Monsieur the Baron, from a man of honour the proof you speak of is enough; you will allow me, however, I trust, for the assurance of friends, to verify the statement.' With the utmost readiness, he at once opened his vest, and said: 'It is now impossible, M. de St. Amand—an eternity has already begun since I spoke—but assure yourself.' Within, was an immeasurable space, out of which some slight ashes were breathed towards me. 'The fire was before in *me*,' he stolidly pursued; 'I am now

in *it*.' The inscrutable Jewish eye fascinated me, as he laid his finger here and there; pressing, as it were, on elastic springs, from which the flame darted up but was gone—neither the billiard-players nor my companions appearing to notice his presence or actions. It was not till the scene vanished that I felt the slightest dismay in awaking. D'Heilbach is, in all probability, alive, and playing *rouge-et-noir* at Paris as last heard of; that he ever possessed a heart, is doubtful; a brain steeped in *eau-de-vie* must, of course, yield at last, unless the term be shortened by the bullet of some Englishman unwilling to be run through, or by his own. Nevertheless, to dream at all may be a proof how well our nature has been read by priests. Is not superstition that very region over which they assert a plausible title? And the question then lies merely between their antique tradition, and the newest fanatic. Even much of the English Protestantism is entitled, on this ground, to respect; though it is far from holding out the same inducements to philosophical minds.

"Yes, my Florian, in one word, I find myself becoming more and more, every day, an Englishman. It would not surprise me to find, ere long, that you yourself have in a similar way modified many youthful opinions. One must give up something of the cosmopolite, if but to live in the uninhabited island of Crusoe.

"I have already purchased, through means of my worthy lawyer, a small property in the neigh-

bourhood of London, called Underwood. I have not yet seen it, but it is charmingly situated in the most rural of districts. The English gentleman-of-the-country appears to combine the greatest number of advantages, of felicities, of good qualities and of duties, to be found anywhere united; even amidst a nation so fortunate. Such a privileged person I cannot exactly, perhaps, ever expect to become. I find myself annoyed at coming under consequent obligations—one thus begins to have what is called 'a stake in the country'—to have one's politics asked about, one's influence entreated for: the idea is discussed as to whether you might be induced to compete for the representation of a neighbouring borough, or to accept a rural magistracy. These posts, it is true, only Protestants can as yet fill; although my reverend friend, Monsieur O. Smith, assures me this will some day be changed for the better. At all events, as it seems taken for granted that I shall avail myself of Sir Ralph's will, innumerable other expectations are formed of me. Society prescribes its imperative rules; the public (a thoroughly insular word!) imposes its obstinate prejudices; even the obscure '*vulgar*' (again how English!) has its sentiment to be considered, its 'burdens' for one's participation. Believe me, it is no sinecure I undertake. One must necessarily sacrifice much, I repeat, to those invidious gods who are enraged at the welfare of mortals.

"Do I say *that*—do I need it? Forgetting the distance to which I have allowed Friendship to be

separated from me? When *you*, instead of reasoning, instead of refining, of enjoying, of hoping, are torn from every elegance of life to the dangers of a campaign, to the hardships of the backwood! When, in short, from a soul magnanimous enough to have appreciated England, you still compel yourself to fraternise with America! No; unlike the too-happy Samian king, Polycrates, I do not need to fling away a ring so precious—since it was already lost too deeply to be restored to me from the ocean by your letters. They bring back only a poignant regret—let nothing, then, interrupt them! No one can be scared from me by such excess of fortune.

"O Florian! is it possible that there may indeed be some region, some island, where friendship is to be regained securely? Dare we not picture to ourselves, too, the desire that beauty—that love—that their responses and their transports, when possessed—may be prolonged into Elysium! Were it not too much, I could at once bring myself to credit the assertions of priests themselves—the widespread persuasion, in fact, which in this singular country seems assumed in a thousand ways!

"Once more, for the time, adieu, my friend! Ever accept the assurances with which I subscribe myself,

"ETIENNE."

CHAPTER V.

THE IDES OF MARCH APPROACH.

Mr. Etherege was again for a few days in Bristol. His visits to Beech Grove had never been too frequent, his assiduities had ever avoided the air of being pertinacious, or tastelessly obtruded. On the eve of another departure for Town, he rode up to Beech Grove, as was but due. He had been, indeed, sparing no pains or care to make his own social position worthy of its chief ornament, destined as the gem of that rich setting. He had rather chosen, it appeared, deliberately to engross himself in securing this beyond all question, and in heaping additional advantages together, which would be found ready spread at its base. There was something of an unostentatious magnificence about the doing of it, not made known even to Mr. Spencer by his son-in-law elect. As when *her* slight indications of any wish upon a point—to her

own near relatives—had been found amply deferred to, on the Count's part; when thus, too, her mere listless caprice or languid disinclination had been quietly, though but the more splendidly, obeyed. Her weariness of Bristol and Clifton and Bath, had been vented in impossible desires for London, St. James's, Almack's, a presentation at Court. Yet she was known to delight in country life, to cling to the thought of being near Mary's future rectory, at Wrixworth, and to have had a girl's fancy about old Herbert Court, as a place to live happy in. Again, like one who had never spoken of these, who blotted them from memory, who hated their very name, she had taken a wild longing to travel, to cross the sea, to live far abroad, and be only known by letters, only remembered through letters. It appeared that this wilful princess-like spirit was truly suited, after all, to the Count's disposition; just as it might have been thought he took no umbrage at a haughty manner, an inanimate reception or sudden shrinking, nor seemingly knew whether most to admire a marble cheek half-turned from him, or its quick flush before she steadily looked towards him to make her studied answer. So was it now, when he presented himself; still full of other business, which was his excuse for haste, and for the hour of his unannounced coming—for the doubt, too, whether she might not have gone down to the country (a fear so delightfully disappointed!)—perhaps also for some more than usual satisfaction glittering in his looks. Deli-

cate as ever, though, he did not mention the precise ground of this latter feeling; which, to judge from the past, was doubtless based on some fresh provision for her future approval. It might be like the house in Town that had never been spoken of by him, yet was known to have been obtained, near St. James's; or like the noble patroness secured for Almack's, the certain Court-presentation, the purchase of a country-seat, the selection of a yacht which could comfortably go abroad to classic Italy or to the tropical Antilles, all understood to be in view for her behoof. This fresh purpose of his, at all events, might well refer to something which she was above caring to know, in comparison with the noble motives that prompted such generosity. She would know it soon enough at any rate, she might have thought. She sat, and spoke, and heard, till the rest came one by one into the drawing-room, and her father's late return from the counting-house brought further change of talk. It was merely a brief, flying visit of the Count's to that quarter; from amidst the important legal arrangements with London solicitors, consequent on his understood succession to the bulk of Sir Ralph Herbert's wealth and property: which his absent cousin, the Captain of the *Astræa*, must needs decline to take on the terms of the old baronet's will.

The Merchant, as usual, eschewed all unbecoming references to business matters; he said but little of the critical times; it might even have been inferred indirectly, from his manner and the drift

of his conversation, that, if the idea of the new partnership had not become indifferent to him, it was at least what is styled a "sleeping" one that he had in view. Mr. Etherege—he said he had lately been thinking—would do himself injustice if he did not ultimately "go into the House of Commons." Nor was there any insincerity, probably, in the smile with which Etherege agreed, that possibly it *might* be a sphere to excite his ambition, if his abilities could but point as high.

"As a Catholic, however"—demurred the merchant, hesitating.

"Oh, as to that," was the cordial answer, "we shall see. The truth is, my dear sir, when we reflect—when we see ourselves surrounded by so many evidences in favour of your Protestantism—it is not inconceivable, I think," and his dark eye, with a softened gleam, sought Catherine Spencer's, "that from a sufficiently bad subject of the Pope, one may yet change for the better, under His Grace of Canterbury?"

"Certainly not—Heaven forbid the contrary, indeed," Mr. Spencer said. "But I thought the terms of Sir Ralph's will, which Mr. Herbert—Sir Richard, I should say, declined—were of that nature."

"No, it seems to have been after all a personal caprice," said Mr. Etherege, calmly. "The old baronet, my grand-uncle, stipulated a rigid faith only to the heir of the title:—it appears, by the terms of the will, he did not so cautiously bind the

freedom of the next-of-kin, a presumed Catholic, the untitled representative of the younger and obscurer branch—in short, my unworthy self. I have not only been studying English law, you see, of late—but theology also."

And Mr. Etherege laughed very pleasantly, smiling round the domestic supper-table.

"Poor Mr. Herbert!" remarked Mrs. Spencer, with simplicity; at the same time supported in the utterance of her feeling, both by matronly position and by evident maternal thoughts of Harry at sea. "His baronetcy is all the worse for him, I suppose. To be sure, 'tis his own free choice—if he comes not home just now. But, according to Henry's last account, such seems Captain Herbert's attachment to his profession, and its importance at the time, apparently—not to mention his popularity with his officers and seamen, that——"

"— That in short, my dear," interrupted her husband, smiling, "perfect propriety forbade his doing otherwise than he does. You forget that these were mere boy's reasons. The truth was, Mr. Etherege, whatever his temptations to the contrary, your cousin had already committed himself in honour to this course, which at any rate opens distinction enough, Heaven knows! With the chance of wealth and rank too, for any one in a position to profit by the miserable scenes of aggravated destruction before us this summer—all but ruin here, I fear!"

Mr. Spencer had grown more than ever excited

at the thought; he was careworn and fretted with late hours and pressing business: it was no easy time with him, and there was much to do before the happy domestic event at the end of March, which would bring Mr. Etherege so auspiciously back, a yet more rightful member of their circle.

"We are somewhat anxious at present," Mrs. Spencer explained to him, "every day expecting their next news—from Harry, I mean—my son's letters, which ought to have been here before."

"True, true, dear madam," responded he, cordially; "our various minor interests conflict somewhat just now. The vessel was, perhaps, in danger? The weather, it might be—or some immediate prospect of naval action."

But, so far from this (as it devolved on Mary Spencer to inform him more particularly, from her special relation as Harry's correspondent), the only complaint had been of tedious cruising and monotonous blockading, without the least opportunity of prize-money or glory. Only, a late dreary and tragical dream of her sister Kate's had alone caused some uneasiness, when joined to the unwonted break in Henry's regularity as a correspondent.

Mr. Etherege's dark eye sparkled at the fresh excuse for looking towards her. She had sat without noticing while they spoke; hearing, no doubt, but not once glancing up, as she carefully netted some parlour trifle. Her face had slowly suffused from cheek to forehead as they paused, while Mr.

Etherege said, gaily: "Believe me, the dream of Mademoiselle Kate only predicts fame to her gallant young brother—and to his commander, my cousin, the full recompense we all wish for him! This Sybilline vision, however—which, from its medium, must be poetical—may I not claim the pleasure of demonstrating my own sanguine interpretation, from the details?"

Thus appealed to, Catherine, for the first time, looked up into the circle; her sudden colour passing again, as she quietly said, with a momentary reproach to Mary in her eye, "'Twas, indeed, so little worth your attention, sir, that I wondered my sister should have brought it thither. A mere nightmare, of the wind outside, with sudden rain beating on the glass—fancied voices swept far apart by the billow, which—which, in short, after the last letters and the day's thoughts or discourse, echoed these somewhat too vividly at the moment!" The recollection still scared her, though; making her dropped eyelids open wider, and her breath draw sharply in; nor the less so at Mr. Etherege's gesture of sympathy, his reassuring smile, his soothing remark and further inquiry. "It is needless, sir," she said, calmly, rather coldly too. "Were there any importance in the silly fancy, 'tis beyond your interpretation, I imagine. The superstition of spectres must be still idler to your superior views, Mr. Etherege, than that of dreams, or even of the creeds which we so foolishly——"

"Psha, Kitty!" interposed her father, though

without observing how Mr. Etherege started, winced, and yet eyed her when she had paused. "'Tis you that lay stress on the trifle you were first to laugh at. To tantalise you no longer, Etherege, with this stuff, there was something in the last letter about our boy Hal's wishing to leave his present ship; a characteristic thing enough for him. Though, as usual, he imputed the fault to his captain—hey, Mary?"

"To having lost Captain Herbert's former good opinion, sir, Henry thought; but himself no less attached than ever," said Mary, warmly—"nay, admiring and——"

"Of course—doubtless. In short, they were likely to separate: so Kate's vision takes the thing for granted, only substituting a catastrophe for civil partings, and drawing upon an old north-country ballad of Mary's for the phantom; which, whoever it might represent, comes home as Master Harry once did himself, with some indescribable midnight horror in its train. *This* time, however, observe"—with that the merchant gazed pointedly round his conscious family, to their guest's expectant looks—"not to Beech Grove, here, but to Herbert Court! Where we, being hospitably installed, it seems, doubtless on a Christmas or Midsummer visit, are no less uncomfortably startled. Read the easy riddle then, my dear sir, as you may—being, as I have understood, by your cousin's own design, his natural successor to the place, such as it is."

Mr. Etherege, with mingled feelings—of depre-

cation at the supposed fact, and of pleasure at the implied fancy,—did evidently read the omen: though no blush responded to his inexpressible glance toward the fair dreamer, whose features received it as sculpture might have done. Mrs. Spencer earnestly trusted that the hope of her son's safety required no such selfish grounds.

"On my honour, dear Mrs. Spencer, I more than echo that hope!" exclaimed Mr. Etherege, warmly. "Nay, were it possible that my cousin Herbert could have received this other property of old Sir Ralph's, by my declining it, Heaven forbid that I should for a moment show my claim. But had I not done so, it passes beyond either, to a more distant relative, who is but the cover for foreign priests. As it is, my own family now become the nearest, the rightful, though once exiled, successors. My cousin himself, before leaving England, designated me spontaneously as his heir at Herbert Court: and even his baronetcy, but for the misfortune of the female line in my mother——"

Catherine, raising her eye, was steadily and keenly gazing at him; while he hesitated, perplexed to understand, perhaps, what her capricious feeling was.

"—All compensation from his favourite profession, I repeat," added he, emphatically—"everything that so restless and, perhaps, eccentric a spirit can prize above calmer pleasures—do I ardently wish for Sir Richard! This singular

wildness of inclination, however — this fierce, rugged, but bold nature — is well known, I believe, to be hereditary — to have urged, in other circumstances, to dangerous ambition, even to crimes."

Mr. Spencer corroborated the remark; Mrs. Spencer manifestly shuddered at the idea,—as Jane said *she* did, and as Mary seemed to think *she* ought.

"Mr. Herbert had no wayward preference for the naval profession," was the startling, deliberate, and distinct remark of Kate, addressed generally round the table. "There was nothing naturally restless in his disposition, nothing eccentric nor fierce. At least, so say the Wrixworth people, who knew him best in his early youth. At first, he must have thrown these prospects away unconsciously—the law seems not only very hard, but obscure too, since it has been already altered in part. *Now*, however, I doubt not, he acts from sincere conviction."

Mr. Etherege seemed to feel himself indirectly argued with. There was intense surprise in the expression with which he looked from her to her annoyed father; but he shrugged his shoulders in the foreign manner, and said, "So much the worse for my cousin Herbert. In his position the sea must suit him best. With a disposition so irregular, so unaccountable, I should pity the poor Lady Herbert!"

"*I* should not pity her, sir!" answered the girl, with a wilful obstinacy growing in her settled face,

and looking at him undisturbed, motionless, unfascinated by the black glitter of his splendid eye.

"I *know*, Miss Kate," he lowered his voice to say, with equal firmness, "that there is, as the English phrase has it, madness in the Herbert—I mean *his*, my cousin's—side of the house. Hence much of their unfortunate decay in the world, which Sir Ralph, I believe, knew, and considered in his will."

"True, true, I have understood so," agreed Mr. Spencer; and his youngest daughter alone smiled. She was still going to speak, and gathering herself for it with some bitter retort, her eye lighting, her bosom heaving. "Kate! Catherine! what *can* you mean, my love?" her father asked; as if aware of a froward wit in her, when excited.

"As Mr. Etherege, I presume, papa, is equally of the old Herbert family," she said, quickly, "I suppose it would be ill-bred to say——"

"You will oblige me by—by being silent, Kate You—you had better, I really think, retire; you need rest—your late harassing anxieties—*ours* rather, I allow—have strained her nerves till she forgets herself, like a spoiled child. Pray, Mrs. Spencer—ah, true—'tis so late at any rate, your leaving us alone together may be excused."

Mr. Spencer had spoken in some agitation; while Kate had submitted, and looked to him with humiliation in her agitated face, and a risen colour burning there. As she hurried from the room she yielded to a natural burst of tears, which, beyond

the doorway, she would fain have pressed back with both her hands. Mr. Etherege had flushed as deep as she. Even *his* courtesy had not sustained him, this time, through the British custom of hastening to usher out the ladies, door in hand. It was her father's figure she saw last from the passage, ceremoniously intent upon keeping up these proprieties—it was his sharpened profile, his shaken voice, that went through the chief trial of self-possession, while he waited for her mother's frank excuses in bidding good-night to their valued guest. As for the latter, he indeed bowed at the obvious explanations—his ruffled sensibility was, so far, not difficult to soothe—he even jested at himself for the Herbert infirmity that had been spoken of, in so aspiring to win his suit; but his conduct was in sincere and earnest keeping with the ardour he had long repressed, nor could he now see reason to force it obtrusively or meanly, by repeating the visit soon. His affairs again called him, indeed, back next day to Town. It rested less with him than them, evidently, even after all that had passed, whether he should return at the understood time in March.

Nevertheless he sat a little longer, that evening, in general talk with Mr. Spencer; the slight *contretemps* still leaving some awkwardness, till graver topics had helped to set it by. Late hours and pressing business weighed upon the merchant's sober spirits: those of his more animated friend were proportioned to his brilliant and growing

fortunes. When Mr. Spencer spoke darkly of a commercial crisis approaching in the country, with the peril to houses of the best and oldest standing, Mr. Etherege was able to cheer him. He said most cordially—and the genuine nature of the purpose remains undoubted to the last—that in any circumstances, as a friend solely and purely, Mr. Spencer might still count on his best possible aid. And in the brief, hurried, emphatic terms of Mr. Spencer's thanks—nevertheless imperatively dismissing that subject—there was more real emotion than ever. It was after a pause, before finally parting, that the latter said, "By the way, as to entering Parliament, if I might advise, my dear Etherege—why, I think, for the present, there would be difficulties —considerable difficulties on the whole. Against the necessary change of religious profession, you see—when at all abrupt, that is—there are prejudices—English prejudices, particularly feminine ones—which," and there was a mildly paternal wisdom in Mr. Spencer's manners and look, "which may be superficial, but are still to be regarded, I think. Hence, probably, our silly little *escapade*—our preposterous *tableau*, as I may call it—of this evening!"

"Can it be imagined that I was serious, sir?" ejaculated Mr. Etherege, almost filially. "No. I remain—were it even more difficult than it is in this happy country—a Catholic. *We* alone can adore the saints as they ought to be adored! You have no martyr's stake to which you can bind us,

did we fear it in such a cause!" He smiled gallantly.

"It was a mere freak of temper, doubtless," said his host, returning the smile, "for which our own indulgence has been to blame. You see it all before you, Etherege—so be warned in time."

"How little do you know me yet, my friend," was the answer, as he rose to go, "when you imagine *that* a warning! It was noble, rather,—it was brave. My gallant cousin, now Sir Richard, happily for me cannot have been much known to your family—very little had been seen of him, surely?"

"Pooh—almost nothing—there is no such possibility," was the reply to a last serious look. "What little there was, chiefly concerned my son Henry. Even from Harry's letters home, we know nothing new of his captain—whom he is soon likely, as I said before, to leave."

"He and I had already enough of reason to be estranged," said Mr. Etherege. "I am glad to have no more. Till the end of March, then! Good-night."

"*Adieu.* In the end of March, *certainly, au revoir!*" There was often far more French, now-a-days, in the spirit and form of this British merchant's speech with his accomplished *bon-fils* in prospect, than the latter retained from his Parisian days. "*A propos* of our previous conversation, however," Mr. Spencer added, as he rang the bell and saw Etherege out towards the hall, "it is just possible,

I may say *en passant*—in so critical a state are public affairs—that press of business may delay our preparations a little. Long before then, I trust, our news from abroad will be satisfactory—our commercial news, that is—but no matter, the precise day can be fixed in correspondence. I shall write to you—it may even be essential to avail myself of your information or advice—of your very presence and encouragement, Etherege, in these days of sudden fluctuation. Depend upon it—believe me—yes, I shall not scruple to presume on your aid so far as *that*, and most frankly too!"

The footman had stood by, bringing the guest's hat and cloak; the which—mindful of his own "vails" and the Count's liberal wealth, John would duly have assisted to put on with care, but was bidden rather to open the door and see the front-gates clear for Mr. Etherege's horses, which came round. His dark valet, Adolphe, now a groom in the sober English style, stood ready before the outer steps; he alone obscurely looking from the dusk into the lighted hall, while the merchant hinted gravely at these delicate matters. There was something impressive, almost tragic, in this gloomy tone of foreboding, joined to the kind yet dignified ease with which Mr. Spencer did the servant's office to his friend, as he spoke; helping to adjust the folds of the young man's outer mantle, then grasping his hand and turning away, manifestly in vague doubt of their next meeting. Mr. Etherege returned the pressure, but not the averted air of

gloom: it was all so different from Mr. Ffloyd's, the sugar-baker's, empressments. "Do so, dear sir," emphatically he responded; "by all means confide in me—nay, do more! Remember, it is in *any* case, Mr. Spencer—to *all* circumstances—that my wish extends. My pressing offer, indeed, which a first inexperience of our English feeling on such points may have led me to——"

"No—no—your *intention* was delicacy itself—you have already done too much," said Mr. Spencer. "I *could*, indeed, have wished that a direct interest in the House might have offered stronger inducements—that a firm like that of Broadby and Co., in the eyes of my future son-in-law—with all its vast prospects if but well supported——With better times, observe, to develope its full resources—but no matter—we have talked of it before! You are *still*——?"

"Yes—we have before discussed it," said Etherege, looking obstinately down.

"And thus, then, there is one possible shadow on the path," sorrowfully rejoined the merchant. "One supposable contingency there is—one bar which events may force me to place insuperably in the way of your hopes—though Heaven grant those events may not occur! I regard you too sincerely as a friend, Etienne Etherege, ever to ask you—to permit you, in short," and his voice was a husky whisper as he concluded, "to become the son of a —in plain terms a—a *Bankrupt*." He shuddered himself, and with a startled gesture hurried in-

wards. The young West Indian stood moveless, though glancing round perplexed. From the distant withdrawing-room there still came light and voices at the opening of a door; and Mrs. Spencer's passing figure seemed to look for her husband suddenly, ere their friend should go.

He was mounting his horse when Mr. Spencer laid a hand on his shoulder from the door-steps, with the good lady's parting message. There were words in it of deputed apology from Kate for any seeming rudeness; which alleged the plea of recent ailment besides, for that as well as for *good-byes* omitted. No more:—yet how much magical influence, over the strangest breast, is swayed by a few of those indirect words, so truly syren-like!

"Should any of your fears actually threaten to be realised, Mr. Spencer," says Etherege, even when mounted, "you will yet write to me?"

"True—undoubtedly," answers his late host, within the doorway, calmly seeing him forth. "But on those points, Etherege, I am firm. In no other way can you—*shall* you—help me. Otherwise, if the worst happens, *adieu!*"

"Write to me! I know not what I *may* be—what my will is—what I yet think! *Write to me!*" So saying he spurred fiercely off; and, over the gravel, through the gates where John waited in vain, down toward Bristol-bridge and the city's lights, rode madly, with the dumb Adolphe still pressing after him at speed.

CHAPTER VI.

BROADBY AND CO.'S *CRISIS* "TIDED OVER."

"CRISIS" and "tiding it over," in reference to the extensive affairs of the house of Broadby and Co. at Bristol, were expressions of great significance for a few weeks in that busy commercial city. They were then stock phrases of a decorous caution in the mouth, and in the eye and gait and manner, and the very clothes, of worthy old Mr. Jephson; that most respectable little managing-clerk, whose long experience had been trained in the firm, and whose whole soul still clung to the hope of its stability. He hurried early to the counting-house, and slowly left it, late of nights; often hovering upon 'Change, and flitting about the wharves, urging the warehouse work and watching the weather-vanes, expecting the post, transacting with the bank, or holding confidential interviews with friends of the house—as if it need not be denied there was a crisis. With his me-

thodical, plodding, faithful aspect, however, and in his sober suit, his unpretentious snuff-brown periwig, and candid tortoiseshell-framed spectacles, he stood Mr. Spencer in great stead. Testifying so clearly to the mercantile integrity and comprehensive views of commerce, by which "their principal" had raised the house to its eminence; and so firmly convinced that even "old John Broadby himself" could not have so well foreseen Colonial troubles, or "weathered them thus long;"—as to gain extensive credit for his belief that these would "be tided over."

All Bristol felt the stress of a pressure which bore upon the country at large, urging British interests through a strait where very shallow water as yet appeared. Broadby and Co. only chanced to lead the way, sounding it as they went, through the means of good Mr. Jephson; to the reports of whose daily look and manner, not without general sympathy for the esteemed merchant at the head, all classes of the surrounding community attended eagerly. Late hours and early openings, with close application to desk and books—faces peering now and then from the dusty windows—blanks by the quay where Broadby and Co.'s vessels should lie—empty shed or idle warehouse-crane—by day an ominous stillness at ebb of tide or flood, creeping round the wharf-corner into the timber creek, under the drawbridge for which people had now far seldomer to wait—at night, the lights reflected in it, of midnight desk-work or

consultation, of late porterage or deferred seamen's payment—these things were noticed too.

When tidings of success in the St. Lawrence came, and of triumph in South Carolina, it was yet indicated there for the better: some happy influence was still shed upon that spot, by a contradiction of the rumour that the Jamaica convoy had been taken, and by the fact that insurances for the Mediterranean had once more become possible. People looked up to the side-windows in passing, from the thick of the harbour thoroughfare and its daily labour, daily glad to see the shutters unclosed; even somewhat in the same manner as they were satisfied to perceive, over the trees by the river-side, that the clock of old St. Austin's Cathedral still moved, and that the vane of St. Mary Redcliffe's splendid tower still pointed true,—that the harbour-telegraph still worked on Brandon Hill, that the chimneys of the sugar-bakeries were all smoking in unison, that in fact the sun shone, the wind blew, the tide ebbed and flowed.

A darker sign was at first imagined in the fact, soon noted, of Mr. Spencer's sudden absence from his place of punctual resort: which turned as speedily as aught else, however, to the house's marked benefit. The face of old Mr. Jephson, for a brief time anxious beyond all precedent, gathered unexpected comfort, grew quickly hopeful once more, and at length shone again. Mr. Spencer's sudden and serious illness was the painful turning-point from which this issue arose. For

a while there was indeed an unusual stillness at the merchant's residence of Beech Grove, combined with an uneasy stir of messages, inquiries, physician's visits, and family returnings or arrivals, over the bark-laid road and gravel. During a short time, with overwrought brain and yielding strength, Mr. Spencer sank into most genuine immunity from the excitement and the care that had made suspense intolerable any longer—hanging on the event of campaigns, the fluctuation of stocks, the course of winds, and chances of cruising frigates or buccaneering privateers. All Bristol felt his value, and bankers perhaps trembled for his life; while solid commercial connexions sympathised and wished to support him. Old Mr. Jephson, but lately hinting at a solemn balance of the books and a possible summoning of those chiefly concerned, had faced a hundred difficulties before, which were worse by far than this. The shut path opened before him. The great house of Broadby and Co. (whose interests and not his own, merely, had strained Mr. Spencer's desperate energies to the utmost pitch of perseverance) was not now going to fall so easily.

Instead of giving in *now*, Mr. Jephson thus took fresh heart, and proved worthy of the crisis. Above all, he bethought him as the tide was turning, of some casual words of Mr. Spencer's from time to time, referring to Mr. Etherege, the Count, his purposed son-in-law; on which some of his very ravings on a bed of fever, incoherent as they were,

had tended to set a stronger emphasis. The family could not but know of it too; yet it was undoubtedly at Mr. Jephson's instance, enclosing his respectful views of the case, that Mrs. Spencer was induced to write to Mr. Etherege in London a hasty and agitated note. It embodied even the substance of her daughter's wishes upon the point, as Catherine Spencer had uttered them from her father's bedside; when a little hope began to dawn, and he was already soothed to some sleep by assurances of the good issue to them all. A terrible time it had been. The country itself was apparently far from "tiding it over" yet. It was the season when the combined French and Spanish fleets of more than seventy sail of the line, under D'Orvilliers, appeared in the Channel, steering for our naval ports: and when nothing but a sudden shift of wind blew them out to ultimate ruin, let Admiral Hardy in, and saved us. All this following closely on that season when the Chevalier Paul Jones, the Scotch gardener's son, had insulted our coasts with impunity, had attacked a North-Sea convoy with his squadron, had by odds and fraud overpowered the *Serapis* (a wretched forty-four on two decks, like Harry's poor friend, the *Buffalo*), and had boasted of it:—though his prey had been resolutely kept from him, and he had returned to disgrace in France, to seek fortune afterwards in vain, to hawk his mock-heroics of Liberty from court to court, and die shabbily (the billiard-marker, as was said before, of this anomalous war). Humi-

liation came home to red-tape Admiralties then, ere Rodney's fleet was yet ready; and Gibraltar seemed doomed. But as for Broadby and Co., Mr. Jephson proved right: they were tiding it over.

March had come, and even the appointed time far on in that month, when Etherege would have grown impatient in any case to be summoned: but before that time he had both written in prompt reply, and posted down from Town to lend Mr. Jephson his intellectual help, to give Bristol the confidence of his presence, to inspire fresh spirits in the Spencer family by aiding the convalescence of its head. *This* last service, it seemed the mere knowledge of his vicinity tended to do. His behaviour was truly delicate in the circumstances. He did not take advantage of the opportunity in any way; neither requiring any pledges in return for his essential aid in the business, nor obtruding any visits of a social kind, while the emergency lasted. The chief benefit lay in his conspicuous arrival at that juncture, his obvious appearance to advise and encourage in the troubled management of affairs, whose guiding hand lay powerless for the time; together with the actual quickness of perception and force of will, which—to the worthy head-clerk's astonishment, as well as to his own reluctant consciousness—he brought to bear on those perplexed mercantile matters. In these latter there were vivid, far-reaching, exciting inducements, mingled with proportionate hazard, which may ere long have attracted a spirit like his, satisfied to bind

itself closer to adopted interests, and perhaps fired with the thought of new powers: the great scale of Broadby and Co.'s transactions might indeed exceed his previous belief; and their security, if shaken along with the country's, seemed scarce less firmly-rooted for ordinary risks than England's own. Mr. Etherege was convinced by proof, of what others hoped upon opinion. He had a keen, clear eye for the balance of probabilities, and the full future use of the event; ambition, in short, may well have joined love, to nourish a budding faculty he discovered in himself, when he turned resolutely, after all, to commercial pursuits. It had been rumoured before, but was now known, that he would enter as a partner in the house when Mr. Spencer was recovered, and the marriage over. Virtually, he was one now. All Bristol understood it; all Bristol wished well to Broadby and Co.: then, too, did all Bristol, and some City of London friends besides, cease to "make a run" upon Broadby and Co.—nay, accorded credit and support to them, and worked help or luck into their hands, and so assisted Etherege's saving offices. News and politics themselves turned upon that side; the West India Spring sugar fleet was looked out for, by additional squadrons and convoys: the weather moderated; Admiral Howe set sail to relieve Gibraltar, Sir Thomas Hardy kept the Channel, disease had seized the combined fleets of the enemy in their harbours, while Paul Jones fled into disgrace, and Sir George Rodney was to head the

splendid force prepared for Western war,—supreme in command, furnished with new mysterious tactics, rear-admirals being under him, a prince among his midshipmen, baronets and noblemen and skilful captains for his staff and train. A fortunate star glittered, as it were, to local view, over the head of Etherege; good-news coincided strikingly with the presence of the Count, the generous-hearted young stranger of Gloucestershire descent and colonial nurture, who staked his ample interests in such times upon the side of old England, and had brought her fair auguries.

Ere March passed over, Mr. Spencer was decidedly recovering. His young friend's messages of inquiry, personal calls to hear of him, deputed good-wishes, and actual interview at last, had their evident share in the effect. Their first meeting took place at the merchant's own desire, while he still kept his sofa; and it was not without its proofs of a mutual regard which circumstances had increased: a feeble pleasure lighting up in the invalid's eyes at the visit, and volumes of affectionate appreciation being spoken by the weak look, the hand tremulously put out. While on the other part, possibly deepened by a new sense of what the catastrophe might have been, grave compassion rose at the sight of cheeks so hollowed and a frame so shaken. Many complicated considerations and moving interests had indeed been involved in Broadby and Co.'s fate. Mere external help could not have saved them. Undeniable effort had been

made by Mr. Spencer, and that of a kind whose intensity was proved in his aspect, to sustain his arduous position without resorting to the generosity now spontaneously accorded to him—for which, at least, he had not himself asked when the crisis came; nay, which he might possibly have still dispensed with, had his strength lasted. He had been more than right—he had exemplified the model integrity of the British merchant—in refusing aid of any other character, or obligations on the ordinary ground of friendship and alliance. The harassing and frightful nature of the risk had been now disclosed to Etherege; and in no feature of it more surprisingly, than in the vortex of ruin by such a house's "stoppage," which would have swallowed up whole boatfuls of expedient, and been utterly unaffected by pouring waggon-loads of well-meant assistance; while all mere planks and bridges from the shore were vain. There were minor "investments" connected with it, there were "shares," "securities," "stocks," and little speculative enterprises, affected or bound by its condition, through the hands of the family's own legal agents or careful trustees; which showed Mr. Spencer's justifiable confidence to have been exceeded in previous times, by his wife's brother, Squire Duttridge of Wrixworth, and by the guardians of his youngest daughter's fortune too. Trivial by comparison with what the Firm had staked, or its mercantile connexions and dependants committed to it,—yet these accessaries were quite as

surely pledged to its fall or prosperity: they brought its peril nearest home, pointing the sense of its upright career, and enhancing the result of its triumph.

Its commercial credit, joined to the public knowledge that it was ably and sagaciously headed, had been the life of the house of Broadby and Co. Even from the near prospect of both attributes being more than ever secure, it drew force to carry it past the danger. At that moment, to society and the public round Bristol and Bath, the coming or staying away of Mr. Etherege was decisive—Count Etherege of Kingswood, as they had obstinately begun to entitle him since Sir Ralph Herbert's property fell in. He might have stamped the fate of a more precarious, or of a safer house. A duller manager than old Mr. Jephson might have profited by the shadow of his intellectual repute and known acuteness. It might almost have been thought, that if he had so wished, he could have given a value to doubtful coin by his mark, and have issued local bank-notes. It was slightly wondered at, indeed, that he had proved so steady a devotion to a mere country heiress, like the youngest Miss Spencer, as to marry so soon, and settle, and turn to sober business—even in a great concern like Broadby and Co.'s. As if people could not have money enough; and the fever of its excitement were no evil, when millions upon millions hung upon the chance of one sea-battle.

But if conscious power were nothing to Ethe-

rege, nor the flattered feeling of one who became the cynosure more than ever of bright eyes and elegant circles round Clifton,—he had his sufficient influence at hand. There was now reflected towards him, through the deep deference of the counting-house at Froom-lane, and through all the various signs of gratitude at Beech Grove, a light of silent appreciation for his conduct, which unutterably surpassed the rest. During those critical days, he had, indeed, seen almost nothing of the fair Catherine, as he had still less pressed himself on her notice. She had been steadily watching by her father till the issue came; her face whitening daily, her eyes dulled, yet dry; while those of old Jephson had been glistening to his very spectacles with thankfulness; and while Mrs. Spencer's wistful looks had grown so cordial at last, that her own son, the overwhelmed Goscroft Spencer from Oxford, was not so affectionately regarded, nay, Harry's half-forgotten letters could scarce have been more welcome than Etherege now. He did not, certainly, at his first congratulatory visit, find Catherine present, nor expect her there. He saw her chair near the couch, beside the window and the medicine-glasses, and *felt* that it was hers—that she had gone away —that he half divined her thoughts, she his. Towards the end she came in, collected, dressed, placid, looking the best she might in such circumstances, giving her hand with a noble ease in spite of all, saying nothing warmer than before; but yet, by her firm friendly glance, expressing a sincere

knowledge of the whole. Something there was in it afterwards, of an intense distinction between him and all others in the room, which keenly marked out and followed him as he was shown forth. It needed only gradual degrees of intercourse, with the tranquil proximity that comes after union, to grow out radiant upon him at last.

Her elder sister, Mary, was going down to Wrixworth with their father, for a short change to the country air as it warmed towards May. All Somersetshire began already to bloom up and deepen in verdure at that month's approach; even the deliberate Rector of Emerton-cum-Chovis, drawing promptitude from recent danger, and emulation from the appointed family event, had at length denoted a strong wish in unison with the whole. Thus, Mary's marriage, also, had been fixed to take place after Easter, before Whitsuntide should pass, along with Kate's; and ordinary convenience alone now delayed the joint-occasion so long. Etherege's patience was scarcely put to the proof: for while old Mr. Jephson still needed his countenance and help a little, he had preparations of his own, that had been somewhat kept back; and above all—Kate Spencer staid behind at Beech Grove.

CHAPTER VII.

A CATASTROPHE BEFALS "COGUEL."

FROM one of those informal evening visits to the domestic circle, which well-established suitors make as their bliss approaches, Etherege was returning on an April night into the town. A colder lover might have lingered on the way, dwelling and dallying in thought upon signs of favour, upon delicacies of implied approval, and on tacit privilege—which maternal consent had smilingly seen, but not influenced. It was early still—too early, doubtless, to go back contentedly to one's inn and sleep: when the warm breath of the night rested not from over the clustered lights of Bristol, the dark fringe of river-harbour, and pale gleam of distant sea; but rose through Redcliffe suburbs to the hill where Beech Grove stood, fluttering among its evergreen shrubbery-foliage, then—with an exotic scent of growing aloes, of green-house myrtles,

balsams, magnolias, and all rare spring blossoms from the well-kept conservatories,—wafted itself away onward into budding woodland depths of the night. Like that breath itself, most men might have been satisfied to pass the glimmering upper windows with a thought, visionary and rapturously dream-like, as lights rose into them and died into darkness: then have ridden in slow reverie homeward. But Etherege did not pause to look that way; he spurred down hill into the breeze, with his forehead bared to it; his dark groom, Adolphe, following in mute haste, till the pavements clattered under them, the few passengers on Redcliffe-side had stopped to look, the toll-man of the new bridge hurried to secure his due from Adolphe's hand. Possibly there had been somewhat of the nature of an ordeal, to a spirit more fiery than itself knew, in the tedious brotherliness of Mr. Goscroft Spencer, who now deigned to accommodate his classical knowledge to worldlier intelligence, and to explain the University rules of conduct—for the benefit of one so strangely unacquainted with them, yet bound soon to know them. Similar self-control might have been demanded even by the fair Jane's excessive attention to his remarks, by her obvious belief that all he said was brilliant, that his tastes were foreign, and that *ennui* was their mutual enemy—music their common resource.

Brief as the intervening time was, in short, and much although the Spencers differed from each other, while one alone was exquisite in the eyes of

Etherege—whether the charm of nature smiled from her or frowned,—his horse's feet were not rapid enough for his thoughts that evening. He dismounted in the town, where the steep street led towards his inn; and, giving the horse to Adolphe, wrapped his cloak about him, with his sword hidden in the folds, to stride restlessly the other way along King-street; toward the noisy harbour-lanes, the windy and plashing docks where the tide came in, by the full taverns and roistering purlieus of the theatre. A lively, stirring night it was, overflowed with the evening leisure and jollity of the good old city—busy, eager, devout, riotous, uncouth old capital of past fortune, and emporium of a departing trade; where they caught at the least tokens of success to the country, as if renewed prosperity must needs tell in favour of Bristol. Some of them might even have recognised the auspicious figure going past, or have marked the distinguished air of Etherege with a curiosity that was sure to end in his praise. There were dangers, too; for the rumours of the streets breathed already of anti-Catholic zeal, roused by the repeals of disabilities, and by private handbills from zealous Scotland, current whispers of treason and foreign spies.

The burly Kingswood colliers, who straggled home as the shops shut or as the Wesleyan class-meetings dissolved, might well have heard of Sir Ralph Herbert's singular will; so also the rolling man-o'-war's men, from the squadron that had come up the Severn to King's Roads, might have

learnt false notions of Sir Richard's disappointment by the same. There were drunken privateers'-crews, from a lucky cruise in the Channel; warehouse porters, lately paid; unemployed dockmen and stevedores, fiery Welsh Methodists, discontented recruiting sergeants, dull sugar-boilers, tattered pig-drivers from the Irish wilds; and hungry-eyed men that slouched along, and haggard-eyed painted women that glanced to a well-cloaked stranger, or greedily glared after his heedless passing. But each transient glimpse was as secure to Etherege's mood, as it seemed congenial to him; breasting the obscure stream of life awhile, perhaps, to feel it swifter ere he turned to rest. The dying street-cries, the twinkling stalls, the hurrying chairmen, the ballad-singers, the gayer sounds from lighted houses, the night-coaches entering or loading at the old Bush Inn, and the distant wheels that rattled home, or slowly creaked up Brandon Hill—all might echo, to his impatience, of the wider world: and then the very histrionic stage of Bristol promised its humble emulation of the elegant *Comédie Française* or of solid Drury Lane. For some new Irish rival of Garrick was "starring it" there that night, in the excellent Bath company; and Macklin himself was promised on the staring bills, with young Blanchard, "the Child of Nature," in "Venice Preserved." The "New Theatre" looked splendid, now by the blowing moonlight through the clouds, now by the flare of the link-boys at the portico,

lighting a toupèed lady and powdered gentleman, in satin and diamonds, to their coach in the crowded side-lane. The stall of the humorous British Punch, over an admiring crowd, squeaked and jabbered opposite; and, as the performances in the larger structure were glaringly that night "for the benefit of the questionable Mrs. Jerningham, patronised by Commodore the Honourable So-and-so Somebody and the Officers of the Squadron," so did it happen that a flaming scroll appeared, wittily, though rudely, above the booth of Punch,—to the effect that the night's performances were for "Mrs. Judy's benefitt, under the Pattern-Age of Properriety and the Wirtuss British Publick." Whether it was that Etherege viewed the popularity of this entertainment with something like incipient relish, that the hour was late, the theatre full, and the afterpiece uninviting—he at least turned the other way; with a smile which showed, to the strollers' lantern as he sauntered by them, like a repressed delight. The regular theatricals were not yet so attractive as they promised soon to be—he had his own private box, indeed, which his friend Lady Die Fanshawe and her *protégés* were wont to adorn rather than he—but all Bristol and Clifton had already stirred at the tidings of next week; when Mr. Sheridan's new "School for Scandal" was to come direct from metropolitan boards, and, under the brilliant author's personal superintendence, be put with every advantage on the western stage. Boxes

were secured week-deep beforehand; benefits, stars, patronages, only meanwhile caught the flow of tide: Lady Die herself had for a moment trembled for the first-night's places she had hastened to beg from Etherege; and her promptitude had saved her, for the Spencers could now again go into public. And it was not Jane alone who displayed an eagerness on the matter; nay, Mary and Mr. Spencer would even try to return in time from Wrixworth; while Mrs. Spencer's quiet tastes had for once yielded to Kate's gaiety and love of novelty, making the festal party complete. An anticipation so lively, so suited to verify his late interrupted prospects, was enough to have caused the glow on Etherege's dark face as he passed the crowd; it doubtless had its share in prompting the liberal impulse of his hand, when he responded to the offered hat which a quick urchin bore about the outskirts. "O gimini!" the boy gulped forth at him, clutching out the gold, and making it safe within his cheek; "here's patternage and no mist—well! But won't ye stop and see 'un turned off, yer ludship—he's got a new dyin' speech an' confession—'tan't over yet—just a-goin' on."

"The Count—the West-India Count!" ran a whisper from about him. A bulky, muffled figure of a man, in the shadow, turned to peer at him from the other side. Etherege had answered by a laugh only; and, still amused, had but wrapped himself the closer, and plunged into the nearest lane.

It was a busy though narrow lane, piercing through all the small night-trades of a city to the disorderly harbour slums, the quay-side jollity, and the noisy eating-houses and cider-vaults below high warehouses, at the backs of stores and factories, on the precincts of the docks. Amidst the hubbub which Etherege quickly traversed, his momentary prominence was lost again: chance alone seeming to have turned the steps of his late muffled neighbour the same way. But once or twice, when the stranger visibly hastened or loitered behind him, the same stall-light flaring on both their figures, the same cellar-window throwing their shadows up, Etherege glanced round, as if to make sure of the suspicious movement—he passed steadily on toward the open wharves, gathering his sword closer; as if to meet the supposable purpose and know its motive plainly, where the sky could shed its light or where the passengers would be fewer. Struck by some sudden thought, however, he stopped short, stepped aside into a court-way, and stood still in the shade as if to mark the better, by a lamp above, who it was that dogged him.

It seemed that the fellow had thus lost sight of him, or hurried by unnoticed among others. There was no further sign, at least, of the supposed follower. With an impatient gesture, and an eye that lighted at the slight impulse, he turned rapidly to the course suggested by his thoughts. It led across the open Custom-house Wharf, and over the swing-bridge from Froom-lane, where Broadby

and Co.'s counting-house stood; past the floating docks and the West India Pool, down toward the thick of Bristol, the sugar-bakeries, and the dingy streets that met at Dick's-court, where old Mr. Ffloyd lived. Few people were abroad this way, though; none had seen such a figure as he looked for. Here the tide brought up a chill, the shifting sea-wind blew coldly through the bare masts, the hatches of every vessel seemed padlocked down and deserted: where the last ship-keeper, stevedore, custom-house officer, or apprentice, leaving the floating avenues by himself, lit his tobacco-pipe and went off with an unsocial, hurried air toward the nearest sound of joviality. As Etherege paused, instinctively observing the spectacle, as it were, ere he followed his fixed course—it might have been thought a slight shiver ran through him, and turned his looks uneasily upward for some pleasanter sign in the sky. Rain was brooding there; spongy vapours drifted up from the Channel, with the day's smoke of the city hanging in them; and beneath it there lingered a pale greenish streak or two of the sunset, while a hollow space was rent into sight above, showing stormy tokens in the keen, tremulous stars. There fell from it all, over dark images of warehouse tops and high black hulls of ships, a doubly chill reflection, where a dead dog's carcase was dipping slightly,—black and placid amid all the eddies which the night-tide sent, all the growing noises which varied round, working about the vessels'

bottoms and the shadows of the wharves. Little proof was there, however, of any idle sentiment in the quick survey of Etherege; voices mingled in the scene that caught his notice, practised as it was in voyage and travel, indeed viewing the nearest objects with somewhat of a seafaring skill and interest. The swing-bridge he had just crossed was opening to let out a sea-bound timber-barque, from the inner quays where she had lain to take cargo for Honduras—a "running craft," as she called herself on her side-board, well manned, well armed; with a stout, bearded captain who thus disregarded convoys and Spanish contraband, and the ordinary dangers of the eighteenth-century seas. She hauled out slowly, with the help of a stevedore or two, who hurried from quay-post to timber-head with the ropes; an old under-harbour-master, in a new round glazed hat and antique sea-garb swelling with the wind, stood by to superintend from shore, and walked to the last corner as she caught the tide-way,—signifying there to her active boatswain a laconic adieu. No others were about, save on the further side her stout captain himself; who, as a boatful of his drinking crew yet lagged behind him somewhere, still gruffly waited and looked up the river to the town, from off a neighbour's favouring bulwarks. Ere his vessel floated past beyond reach, he stepped along a projecting boom, and lightly swung himself on board; while among the friendly voices that now parted from him, there was in particular one which attracted Etherege's ear.

"Ay, ay, governor—time enough, time enough for passengers," returned the deep-voiced captain, jovially. "I reckon this tide won't help us much past the Sea Banks, and it's luck if we're as far as King's Roads to-morrow night! All the safer for *him*, though, if his health suits so with quiet! Anyhow it's you that backs him, governor, and answers for the rhino—so, *safe* it is! Jack Freear is the man to ship and land him!"

The strange governor was jovial also, his husky voice sounding of late cordials and good cheer. He chinked a well-filled pocket with his hand in it, and laughed as they were parting. "Ho, ho, yes, Captain Freear, it's *me* that backs him—cash down on delivery, mark ye, over the ship's side. As you say, it's safer at King's Roads. You'll anchor there, and wait for him till night, to-morrow."

The ship-captain, moving sternward to his friend the speaker, still kept at hand, and nodded. "Blast this foul wind!" he said. "Though *that's* nothing—but it chops and changes like a hurricane off the Bahamas. We ain't half manned besides, yet — say till daybreak, gov'nor, and I'll stretch a point for ye. What's the password—what name, sir?"

With that the anxious captain stretched toward his director in the affair, and the latter to him in turn. A husky and hissing whisper came deep across the water—overheard without special heed save by Etherege—which answered, half jestingly, half fiercely, "I told you, Coguel—ah, Coguel, mind

the name, look ye, my prim old Trojan!—Ho, ho!" coughed the hoarse voice, meaningly. "Ay, Señor Coguel, an old broken-winded Portugee, curse him—but rich—rich, Captain Freear, mind ye—so take care of him—hoist him safe aboard—keep the land-sharks clear!"

With an assuring sign, Captain Freear receded and disappeared within. The two vessels were far apart, the swing-bridge settled to its place again, and the last gathering passengers crossed over. Ere Etherege resumed his course, a bulky and muffled figure had dropped upon the opposite wharf, leaving the moored ship beside it with an ease that told of habit, though agility might have failed. And soon, in the empty street which led to the sugar-bakery, the same step that had followed him with apparent design before, was again rapidly overtaking him; but seemed unconscious, this time, of his proximity. Mr. Etherege turned in the shadow of the houses, and abruptly met his late unaccountable pursuer in the face, as the latter trolled hoarsely the catch of some wild old sea-song. It was, as Etherege had already well assured himself, no other than old Ffloyd in person—though, for a professed Methodist, most unfitly engaged. The sugar-baker started back, making a motion as of ready defence; yet looking much more careless, bold, almost jocose and rollicking, than his wont.

"Hallo!" he laughed out, "an odd chance, Monsoor! Been latish abroad, you see, for a business man like me, and so—ha! ha! begging

your pardon, a little mellow! It's not to be denied —mellowish, so to speak!"

"A fortunate rencontre, Mr. Ffloyd," was the sarcastic answer. "I was even about to seek you, sir; but I fear you scarcely recognise me yet— pray, lay aside any suspicions which wealth might experience at night — leave your weapon, your pistols, in their place. You know me, do you not?"

The gentleman had put up his hand with a meaning gesture, and came closer still; at the same time showing the dress-sword beneath his cloak, as the stout old sugar-baker repeated that ominous movement about his buttoned spencer. Mr. Ffloyd looked fixedly at him in turn; then, with a quick glance around the obscure vicinity, still turned the mutual awkwardness aside by a laugh. The lane was dusky and narrow, a deep canal bordering it from the river-crossed docks: even old Ffloyd, for all his years and unwieldy bulk, looked the more suited to some desperate thought, as his mien partook of an unaccustomed energy; while a former vigour seemed revived in him for the time, and there was a flickering fierceness in his eye, an unsteady attempt at coolness and command in his attitude, which, once on a day, doubtless, he might have easily borne out.

"*Carramba*—no—no!" muttered he gloomily, with something of a pride that suited the Spaniard's expletive he used. "Of course I knew you, Count. In fact, a little ago, I just wanted a quiet word or two myself with your excellency, or your

lordship, or whatever's the correct title—I don't pretend exactly to know it, monsieur! But I bear ye no malice—I'm a plain man—I just merely wanted matters square between us. Perhaps we'd better talk of 'em at a safer time, though, by daylight, over a desk in a business way? I own to being heated a bit."

"Let us proceed on your way homeward, Mr. Ffloyd," said Etherege, not less bland than usual; while he dropped his light rapier to its place again, and walked closely by his companion's side. "True, the terms are in some respects unequal—since you might have something to gain by an accident to *me*, whereas *I*—my interest is, in short, your safety."

The sugar-baker turned a swollen hot face to him. "If I was the Portuguese dog you take me for," he said hurriedly, "then I might play foul tricks of the kind! Here I've been tracked on that scent—I've been watched for it—it's hounded me on, not only to my ruin, but past it—my poor immortal soul's damned for it—what more's wanted of me, by G——?" Stopping and vehemently asking that question, he stared into Etherege's face.

Even Etherege shrank and quivered from the changed look, though returning a deliberate answer. "You grieve me, Mr. Ffloyd—you even surprise me—alluding, as I presume you do, to mercantile affairs. I have lately mixed in these, and could have anticipated some such difficulty on your part

at a trying period, had my attention remained fixed on you. It must shock your friends here, on 'Change! Still, you have the consciousness of your own mind to sustain you—nay, as I before offered, you shall be still more amply repaid for the service to my young friend, Etterega, at Barbadoes. Only, what we want is—*Coguel.* Mark me, Mr. Ffloyd, he must remain at hand—he must be forthcoming when required—Coguel *must* not disappear!"

"Curse and blast Coguel—let him rot where he lies—I know nothing more of the carrion!" gasped Ffloyd. "The sugar-bakery can't go on a day longer—the very wages won't be got—we've to stop payment, unexpected to the very clerk—no books to speak of, in fact, for I didn't keep 'em. I've been robbed somehow—I've lost by others, ay, and by those that have weathered the storm," added he fiercely; "like Broadby and Co.! Who's to face it, I ask—who's to bear me out—I don't say at chapel, but my own family when Stokes the wholesale grocer gives 'em up, and that sleek young preacher of theirs, whining for 'em? No—*d——n it!* I ask ye, man to man, Count—deal by me like a man, and let me pass clear. There's worse at the back of it, if I could breathe the thing—but fly the country I must, and will take your honour as a gentleman for my chance of a fair start. Come, sir—matters are all right for your friend, the young Senhor—I took care to have 'em so, and no mistake about it, seeing what was his

main drift." He made a step forward as if to take the young West Indian's hand, with the further words, "In fact, I wish Senhor Etterega well, Count—and as I'm a living man ye shall hear of the course I mean to shape, so as to know my whereabouts when wanted. As to money—nothing of the kind—as luckily none's needed yet. Ay, say the word, Count St. Amand, and all's right and tight betwixt us!"

The young man drew coldly back. "This will not do, Mr. Ffloyd," he said. "No, I neither inquire, nor make pledges, as to *your* affairs. The sole condition has been stated to you. Immense interests may yet depend on the legal evidence of Coguel, whose '*honour!*' alone might not satisfy gentlemen. Even men of the world might perhaps scorn it, as you say, in a day or two. Meanwhile trust me only for what you have told—for *no more*, mark me!"

"And I've told *you*," returned Ffloyd, sullenly, "that Jeronimo Coguel has no concern with *me*—that I'm not the man—that it makes no odds for him, whether I go or stop. I'll tell ye more, and so make your will of it. Coguel, and more like him, met their due, to my certain knowledge, many a good year ago at the back of Cuba—bloody traitorous hounds all of 'em—aye! and I've seen the day, Monsieur Count, if you'd stood up on deck as you stand now by that street-post, and curled a lip at me, by ——! By all that's holy! have a care, you beg——"

With a swift, rigid arm did Etherege catch his, meeting his passionate gesture, and wrestling to hold him from some dangerous weapon near his hand. There had once been great strength, evidently, in the man, which would have far outmatched his lithe young antagonist; but as it was, the latter now got the mastery, and bent him breathless against the nearest wall. Holding him thus, Etherege stooped his own face close, white with the intense effort:

"Once for all, then, old pirate," he hissed into Ffloyd's ear, "if not Coguel, what other villain *are* you? As for me, you did not after all know me, I see—Etherege is my name—Etterega himself, the murdered Don Victor's son!"

The struggle was at an end, as the elder man's resistance ceased; he only held up a palm mechanically for breath, while his throat made a crackling within, and his protruded staring eyes goggled in hideous intentness at the energetic young Count. The latter relaxed his grasp with some degree of alarm; and let him go, nay, partly helped him, leaning, staggering as he moved, toward the steps in the nearest doorway. There, before seating himself to recover speech, the sugar-baker turned to Etherege, and with one of those irresistible movements whose strangeness bears them out, snatched both hands of his supporter—held them convulsively—stooped and peered close, long, earnestly, into Etherege's face. As he sank panting down at last, an uncouth hysterical sound broke

from him, between groan and laugh; and even his sternly excited companion shrank from him visibly. A late passenger or two still traversed the streets; the watchman's call and the sound of wheels yet mingled through the wind, which grew with the tide up-harbour: it seemed possible that Ffloyd's stupefied manner and apoplectic look might end for the worst, ere he left that spot; a spot whither other eyes might have traced him in Etherege's company. No wonder, therefore, if the latter drew his cloak about him again with a shiver, and the chill gloom of the night struck to him, backed by a gust of rain that startled Ffloyd also.

"Sou'-west—hard sou'-west, and no mistake," muttered the latter, vaguely looking up. "Most likely it'll blow home for days. No chance with the *Juana* now—Freear don't leave the Sea Banks this tide, that's clear! No, nor next either." And he got to his feet in haste, with some disturbed ejaculation about catching the early Bath stage-coach for Town; but still stumbling, and perhaps, at sight of Etherege's settled face, rearranging his own scattered senses.

"I—I see!" he said, "you're the Count—your notion was, I meant to play you foul. Natural enough too, by G——! Ha! ha! it *did* run in my head, so help me! But it's over—as I'm a living man, it's forgotten, look you! And as to the Don's blood,"—he wrung Etherege's hand as he spoke, gazing more than ever keenly into his eyes,—"I might well wish I was as clear of every one's! Ay,

if—ho! ho! if that Coguel didn't haunt me yet, with his blasted crew, and——"

"Your house is near, Mr. Ffloyd," was the impatient answer, wincing from his vile disclosures. "Let it be left for justice to decide, sir—if your evidence should indeed be needed."

"I'll face it out now—no fear, no fear, *Senhor*," Ffloyd eagerly persisted. "*You* shall be kept all right, if I risk swinging for it! All I ask is, when it comes to that, you'll do the true thing to back me out and clear me. I'm getting up in years myself, and it don't much matter where I land—a little change and freedom would do me good, I think. Curse it! I feel shaky in the wind, yet—won't ye lend me a hand home, Senhor? Just see us safe round the dark corner, anyhow—we might go in and talk of it comfortably, a bit?"

Etherege drew back with a shudder, whether at the mere thought of again supporting the coarse old wretch's unsteady bulk, or from a deeper suspicion at his proffered confidence and society. "Not now, certainly," he said; and turned with a loathing shrug, to hurry away: "these foul lanes sicken me—it is stifling—there is fever near, surely. I scarce yet comprehend your assertions—your proofs, I mean—but—but at present excuse me, Mr. Ffloyd, I am unfit—unable, see you! To-morrow—yet if guilty, *fly*—fly, and *my* vengeance must endeavour to let you pass! Remember the Law is ruthless here—it is inflexible against piracy—against what is at least called so by Englishmen."

"Oh, well," was Ffloyd's callous answer, as he recovered strength; lowering his voice horribly to a whisper, and edging closer, till his breath came warm on Etherege's cheek; "it's not that, Senhor —no—in that respect the babes in the wood an't more innocent, as in good time I'll prove to ye! It's—it's this, look you." He was drawing closer still to tell, but the vehement interruption cut him short.

"No more, I say. Man! no more—are you fiend or—or only *fool!*" The young man fiercely stamped upon the ground, menacing him with a terrible eye. "Try me no further, Ffloyd!" he added. "If innocent of it, as you assert—as you *swear*—then count on my best aid—my efforts—the whole influence of my wealth, which will be immense. Be but mute—prudent—claim no mad, insane, frantic obligation on my part—I know almost nothing of you—we are strangers, but for your service as to Coguel!"

"Ay—well—as you'll have it, Senhor," gloomily replied Ffloyd, hanging his heavy head, "we're strangers. I'll count on you, though. By G——, it's no more than nature to stand by me, as I'll do by you. It's no small matter to prove the Don's first marriage, if needful. Like I've done already, Senhor—and what's more, like I could *yet!* To the last gasp, mind ye—and that better than any other living man too! Ho! ho! no fear!"

"Again—*devil!*" gnashed the Count between his teeth, striding apart for self-restraint. "This

passes sufferance—for Heaven's sake do not tempt me—blood were a trifle to the rage—the madness! His *first*, sir! What do you mean? There was no other—you mistake, sirrah—you rave—but no matter, if you can fly—if you dread the result of some other crime, Mr. Ffloyd—escape, sir! Fly, and wherever you wish it, money shall follow you—you shall be rich beyond your need, above your very habits of——"

"It's too late for that," muttered the sugar-baker, shaking his head. "If the wind hadn't shifted sou'-west, I might—and a stiff breeze it'll be, look! As for the stage-coach, they'd soon track me —'twould look bad, besides—like pleading guilty, in fact. No—I'll face it out—I'll stand by you, Senhor, and come through. No fear! The weather's done me good, by gum—it's sobered me—I'm all right again. Ye don't look so much the better of it yourself, Count—it's my turn now, let's see you safe up-street a bit, homewards?"

"Begone—leave me—no—no, good-night, I am well, sir!" returned Etherege, wildly; and they parted. Ffloyd stood for a little and watched him dash off against the blast, with his cloak flapping from the rain, and with unsteady strides: something like a considerate wistfulness being mingled with the sugar-baker's gloomy interest.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FIDELITY OF MATTHEW FFLOYD.

THE south-west wind still blew up the Channel the next day, and bound the outward-going trade of Bristol fast in port. The flood-tides swelled into the quays with a stormy look and weedy odour, that spoke of the tumbling Severn sea, and of the surf beating around Portishead; baffled sea-gulls flecking the gloom above Clifton Downs; stiff church-vanes creaking, casements rattling, streets and wharves swept by the gusty rain. Yet Bristol bustled up into its usual life; it rumbled, clattered, hummed, boomed, plashed and resounded through the smoke and through the steam, from morning till noon and on again; till watery sunshine promised to break through ere night, and a fragment of a rainbow arched the sky beyond St. Augustine's old cathedral tower in the east. Not even a sugar-bakery chimney had stopped yet, out of the many

that helped to darken the air; the very weather was redolent of their busiest future, since it must tend shortly to bring home the long-expected Jamaica fleet. The news bore similar hopes, and, cheering as they were at least for the West Indies' safety, rejoiced the hearts of firms like Broadby and Co. Worthy old Mr. Jephson himself, still bearing the chief mental burden in Mr. Spencer's place, sat confidently there; though alone that day, uncounselled, unsupported, scarce expecting counsel or support till fairer weather. In solemn private state apart, with Mr. Spencer's desk before him, the Count's late seat left vacant by, he looked up from balanced books, from affairs settled or provided for, and from the shipping-lists and newspapers, through the dull windows and driving rain to the empty wharf, and still rubbed his spectacles cheerfully. Mr. Spencer was in the country yet, regaining the health that had been so tried, and Mr. Jephson was glad of it; at Wrixworth, down in Somersetshire, he hoped they did not feel the gale, or the damp. The Count did not visit Froom-lane that forenoon, and who could be surprised, when the very dock-porters took shelter? Neither of those superior minds was needed; there was no trouble, emergency, or engagement to be met that day. The crisis was over.

Notwithstanding which, at this very time Mr. Jephson was much startled and somewhat amazed by a circumstance then occurring in the apparent course of ordinary business. One of the clerks,

deferentially tapping at the private door, and gravely entering, brought in with him a bill due on that date at the Gloucester and Somerset County Bank; which the messenger of that well-known establishment, according to their usual friendly course, had just presented thus early in the day. Upon the figures, text, signatures, and marks of this formal document, too simply couched and easily recognised to need long consideration, did the worthy manager gaze a few moments—as he had lately too often gazed on other such missives—but this time, moreover, with some suppressed agitation. As usual, however, he nodded, handed it back without turning his head, and carelessly saying it "would be attended to," seemed to resume the busiest writing, though with an inkless pen. When the door was closed he sat up and reflected in consternation of no slight degree. Whether from his own strange inadvertency, or Mr. Spencer's excusable fault, amid the recent confusion of them all—certain it was that no provision had been made for this most manifest liability of the firm. Obviously as it ought to have been kept before them — nay, easy to hold in mind, and natural to prepare for,—their formal register of pending engagements had failed to warn him of this very serious one. The ledger, he had thought, gave no hint of any such omission: he nervously searched it again for proof of his oversight; he once more examined the cash-book and the bill-book, but still in vain; and he would have called angrily for the book-keeper, would have sent off

post-haste to call Mr. Spencer—would fain, in fact, have despatched a speedy message to Mr. Etherege, as the time and circumstances alone allowed him to do with effect. *What*, indeed, would the latter say of so heavy an item, apparently concealed till now? "£1500—*being the last instalment of whole sum due for my share of interest in the Firm of Broadby and Company payable by the said firm jointly and by you individually*," &c.;—drawn for, four months previous, by the ex-partner, Mr. Ffloyd; and duly accepted by Mr. Spencer for the house and for himself.

The merchant's subsequent anxieties might account, doubtless, for inattention to the matter on his part; as the sugar-baker's own exigencies had, of course, required him to discount the draft, and use the money when it came. Closing a series of such legitimate mercantile transactions for their mutual convenience, the bill had worn an air but too familiar to Mr. Jephson. Its predecessors had mattered little; it was this one only, which, unanticipated as it had been, might now bring ruin. He thought of hastening to Mr. Ffloyd—but it was, doubtless, long beyond Mr. Ffloyd's hands:—sympathetic instinct even taught him to beware, notwithstanding the late senior-partner's miserly repute and understood wealth, lest a single touch in those precarious times might shake even the solid, glowing, prolific sugar-bakery itself. Of the Bank and its friendly interest in both firms, did he now think, too,—but then, at present, even banks were trembling. And again he thought finally, as

it seemed, though not without some shame, of the inexhaustible and magnanimous young Count alone—Mr. Etherege—the partner in prospect—the future son-in-law of their honoured principal. To Mr. Etherege's inn, therefore, he was now on the point of hastening in person.

Yet, as Mr. Jephson drew his waterproof gaiters on, and assumed his outer-spencer, looking round for his umbrella and hurrying to go—a strange slow thought, that had been hovering about him, darted as it were down behind, and struck him forcibly; till it flashed again from his face at sight of a coinciding circumstance. He had stepped to one of the hazy, steaming windows, rubbing it to see along the half-deserted thoroughfare by the quays, and down the cross-lane, for some passing hackney-coach or disengaged sedan-chair—rubbing his spectacles, too, and fixing them for the errand—when he was aware of a familiar figure that hurried past as usual at that hour. Familiar though it was, nor hurrying more than the weather prompted,—in fact with huge but easy steps posting home at the workmen's dinner-hour, through wind and rain to his mother's house on the Redcliffe-side—this punctual figure itself, ever associated till now in Mr. Jephson's thoughts with honest diligence, left the spark which fired a train of dark suspicions. There was even mingled with his horrid doubts, a gleam of joyous relief from Broadby and Co.'s own abrupt dilemma; and though Mr. Jephson gasped as he leant against the casement, watching the sugar-baker's clerk out of

sight—his only clerk, young Thomson, the simple-faced and stalwart Joseph—he took afterwards a deliberate breath, and nodded meaningly, and sat down in resolute reflection. Thomson it was indeed—Thomson, whom he knew so well by sight, to whose salutation he always nodded when they met, to whose regularity at church he himself could testify, and had often approved the lad's dutiful care of his decent mother; nay, Thomson had even now looked up, and seen him, and hastily touched his hat in going by. But it was Thomson in a new light—Thomson, who used to whistle as he passed with a careless face, a threadbare suit, and no set of sudden recollections left behind him. Another and calmer review of the bill-books, which Mr. Jephson now mechanically took, threw a new light on the present demand of the Banking Company. The whole sum due to Mr. Ffloyd, so far as books by double entry could speak, had been drawn for and met already. What, then, was *this?* Was it not Joseph Thomson who came and went on all Mr. Ffloyd's counting-house affairs—it was he who performed the slight book-keeping of the sugar-bakery, wrote all its accounts, did its bank business. The well-known handwriting of that portentous draft, as of the others before, was his. And *his*, by startling possibility, might not those all-essential characters at the foot of it be reckoned?

That signature had somehow fixed itself this time on the troubled retina of Mr. Jephson's vision, in a way that most unwontedly recurred and stirred his after-questions; peculiarities of its aspect rose

to memory and stared upon him; it fascinated him with the thought, that if it could but once be scrutinised again, questions of payment might sink to a trifle, and his "financing duties" (as his phrase was) become nothing,—compared with the stern necessity that ensued. True, he quivered as the corroborating series of facts arose—Mr. Spencer's utter omission of such an engagement, Mr. Ffloyd's complete and surly estrangement since the last was paid—with Joseph Thomson's silent passing of late, his care-worn look, his better clothes, his heedlessness of weather, his haste, and the bundle he carried below his arm; even the watch he had pulled out to compare with cathedral time. Mr. Jephson had never noticed him with a watch before—nay, other things were recalled to Mr. Jephson's attention, which for the first time bore against young Joseph, and joined in ominous significancy on the point. For his mother had recently begun to keep a little shop in Redcliffe, and, the last three or four months, they had seemed much more comfortable on the whole —owing, as they had given out, to some relation's death—while Joseph himself had whistled remarkably, considering the critical times, and of a Sunday had looked singularly spruce, and had been met walking of a Sunday evening on the Cathedral-green with a very comely young lass, a pensioner's daughter, who lived near them. Recruiting sergeants had cast looks at him in vain, and he had apparently ceased to trouble himself about martial glory in the war—hard as his berth

must be in the sugar-house office, under Mr. Ffloyd. No wonder if he had had his temptations there. But *this* was terrible indeed! No wonder, that day, if he was gloomy, and posted along heedless of the weather—flying wherever he might, perhaps, to be out of the way. "And so much the better," Mr. Jephson thought. "Goodness grant it, that he even escapes!"

But straight to the banking-house did Mr. Jephson now hasten, prompt and efficient, supported by the gravity of his doubts; instead of betaking himself as he had meant, in no composed or suitable frame, to the inn of the Count de St. Amand. Obtaining forthwith a second view of the important document on which his business turned, he could doubt no longer as to its real nature. Every other consideration pointed to the dark inference drawn from closer scrutiny; which his looks expressed, and which already awaited but Mr. Spencer's reply to the special message despatched for it, in order that plain words might follow after. As it was, at his private interview with the managing partner of the bank, in its confidential recesses, the worthy head-clerk of Broadby and Co. spoke volumes by his cautious manner, by his significant inquiries, by the sense of responsibility forbidding him to "retire this draft" till Mr. Spencer's reply should arrive; by the concern, too, which he showed, rather for some other "party" than his own. The likelihood of the case stood, in fact, as he had supposed: it was really the sugar-baker's clerk

who, as usual, had transacted this with the other discounts and deposits of Mr. Ffloyd's business at the banking-house; a business whose average amount, hoarder or usurer though he might seem, had long been of value. Some slight alarm stole to the Banker's face: yet "That young man was beyond all doubt above suspicion—brought up in the employ—guaranteed, sir," he added, rather angrily; "and I should say, Mr. Jephson, so far equally confidential with yourself! Pray have a care what you hint at. Some error, some very natural mistake—some——"

But Mr. Jephson, with much respect, deprecated all intention to hint against any one. He would have proceeded to explain, perhaps;—as at least representing the firm whose interests lay very near, at that crisis, to those of the United Counties' Bank; while their joint magnitude certainly far exceeded the importance of Joseph Thomson's character—when the banker's growing alarm withheld him. "Bless me, though — that same lad, t'other afternoon, hurried in with a cheque in overdraft for men's wages—which of course, as old Ffloyd is what he *is*, we cashed—though his credit side happened to stand low at the moment, I believe. Hem—this Thomson, you think—um—might be part of a system of—of——? Hush—*hush*, Jephson—we'll wait your principal's express back, eh? Come, if there's still really any little hitch there, you know, as there may,—we must, of course, manage to bear ye comfortably through for

the time! We are well aware, I assure you, how strongly you're supported."

"And if—ay, *if*, sir, in all respect I must observe," said Jephson with dignity; "if it's as I take it solemnly to be, a most deliberate, audacious——"

The banker, gently, almost pushed him out of the private door. "Oh! Then!" he said, "ah—yes, in *that* case—why, the infatuated young fellow is young—he's been poor, of course, and very likely led to it by dissipated companions, Mr. Jephson. Mr. Ffloyd must bear the brunt—he is well able—at least I—I hope so. If not—if *not*—we wash our hands of it. There's the law. Somebody must suffer. I shall be here till the bank closes—lose not a moment after you hear—let me know in time?" And old Mr. Jephson, bowing, turned back in prolonged anxiety to Froom-lane.

Happily, Wrixworth in Somersetshire was not beyond posting distance within the time; and when his messenger brought back Mr. Spencer's answer, the worthy manager's suspense closed. A most deliberate, audacious, but at the same time, plausibly contrived forgery there undoubtedly had been; favoured by late circumstances of the house whose name had been used, with the recent illness of its principal. Mr. Spencer was now about to follow personally on his hasty note of instructions, and as promptly as his health would allow in such weather; meanwhile committing full legal powers to his trusty deputy, as the case might require.

The Bank alone, however, judiciously preferred to deal with it; and held the same evening an interview with Mr. Ffloyd himself at his own residence, where indisposition had all day detained him within doors. Even to *his* surprise, it seemed, his clerk had not been found at the usual post in the little office of the sugar-bakery; whither the young man had in fact failed to return that afternoon, since his dinner-hour. Joseph Thomson was undeniably missing; nay, it proved next morning, had fairly absconded, having been seen by various persons on the course of his flight: and when his track was found, he had gained a long start of pursuers by a Bath diligence, doubtless to catch some fast night-coach into the midst of the distant labyrinths of London town. He had left all in confusion at his post; things that had gone wrong before, had afterwards gone ten times worse; the books, such as they were, seemed mere fragmentary records of chaos: the very works had come to a stand-still, the workmen had broke into disorder, and there was a cry, amidst fumes of burning sugar, that to-morrow's wages had vanished from the empty pay-bags in the office-chest. Little wonder if the old sugar-baker appeared stupefied, gloomy, and incoherent in his statements; under the sudden blow to a personal confidence that had never till then been shaken. On young Thomson's single head, during the whole night and ensuing day, were all the measures of just indignation throughout Bristol expended. Justice proved

even keener, however, than had been hoped. For its officers had traced the fugitive with ease to a stage-house on the great road, where they found him callously waiting while the horses changed; and so brought him back next evening to jail.

Great surprise had been assumed by young Thomson at this capture: he had professed to be going on a special errand of vast importance for Mr. Ffloyd, to a London house who were friends of his; and his bundle had proved to be of the simplest nature, his purse slenderly furnished, his luncheons and refreshments frugal to a marvel. Still, Mr. Ffloyd disclaimed the assertion, was disgusted at his cool villany, and even refused to see him: so to jail was Thomson straightway committed. Only, a further light seemed cast upon the matter in general, by that second night's event. The sugar-bakery had stopped finally, its confusion was irremediable, its wages were nowhere forthcoming, and the solid, warm, miserly, rich, old citizen, once good for a "plum" at least, was known that same night through Bristol for a sudden and total bankrupt. Even stranger rumours still were running, about Mr. Ffloyd; far more unpleasant whispers crept among his best friends. The same Saturday afternoon, in reality, he was had in person before the Mayor on the bench, who knew him, and to the best of his power kept the court clear. The charge was graver than any which could be sustained against his clerk Thomson; being no less than the capital one of forgery, on which, with

much pain on the worthy Mayor's part, Mr. Ffloyd was, in fact, remanded before final committal at that late hour to the jurisdiction of a higher court.

"Bail will of course be quite ready, my lord," said his lawyer, rising. "We have the very best bail at hand, Sir Timothy, and to any amount—the *very* highest, your ludship—it can't possibly be refused, I trust!"

The Mayor of Bristol caught the anxious legal eye, and half involuntarily nodded. "Well—till the beginning of the week, when the case can be settled—*I* have no objection—none, Mr. Jenkins—no. Must be heavy, though—two *of* 'em of course, sir—two thoroughly responsible parties. Name 'em—name 'em at once, pray."

The proposed names were handed up and read; the Mayor again nodded, and the clerk read them aloud, one name being that of the Count St. Amand. There was about that name, it appeared, something so influential throughout all Bristol and its neighbourhood—so significant of wealth, power, distinction, honour, and, it might be, of acutest judgment—that neither by Broadby and Co. nor by the bank itself, was opposition offered. An impression that such bail augured innocence, at least promised some decorous settlement of the dire affair, must have diffused itself as they waited for confirmatory appearance. In regard, however, to the most important of these securities, they waited in vain; till justice could sanction the delay no

longer. The Count had been sent to, but returned no answer, and came not himself.

When the court rose, Mr. Ffloyd was therefore removed in custody. He heaved up his bulky figure to go, forcing a flushed, heavy smile to his legal agent, and saying there was some mistake—he would soon set matters right with the Count, who would of course see him that night. "It's a sort of form, this, I fancy?" added he, sulkily.

"Of course—of course, my good sir—a form," the lawyer said. "Your clerk's case is a different matter altogether—it *really* looks bad."

"D——n him! why didn't the fellow run for it better!" was Ffloyd's muttered answer. "He'll swing for it instead!"

At night, Ffloyd wrote to the Count a very pressing request to see him on the morrow. But to-morrow came, and the spring day brightened outside, and holiday bells rang from the church steeples over the sounding city, and neither a new evening nor new night brought the Count St. Amand to the dingy jail-room where Ffloyd sat confined. Lucky it seemed, that it was a holiday; during which the case stood over, to allow of Broadby and Co.'s appearance in it, at the same time giving fair play to the friends of both individuals accused. Mr. Ffloyd heard, meanwhile, that there were thoughts of letting all charges drop against his clerk, and bringing Thomson's evidence against himself. At length he took up a

sudden energy; wrote again, and late that night despatched a rather shabbily-dressed attorney, charged with some private words besides, to the Count's inn.

Etherege had treated the previous appeals with mingled surprise and disdain, smiling somewhat sarcastically at their continued urgency. The tenor of the last note, however, was no sooner perceptible to him, than his smile vanished; there was even a startled expression in the glance he bent on the low-bred attorney, as if to search the latter's knowledge of the contents. This possibility—from the cautious tenor of Ffloyd's verbal message, as by the bearer's obsequious deference—it was plain that Mr. Etherege need not suspect; if, indeed, the purport in question could have been intelligible to others. He re-read the sugar-baker's note—a hasty, agitated, blotted scrawl—with his most unmoved air, a front like sculpture (just tinged with olive), and teeth set slightly; then put it carelessly up, and gave his attention to the legal bearings of the case. "Yes—I see—it needs care," he said, at the end. "And, as you remark, sir—promptitude. Do not spare either on your part—I knew Mr. Ffloyd—I will even, if necessary, supply the cost of his defence. To-morrow morning I will endeavour to see him, as you wish—yes, it may be of service, as he imagines. Doubtless it will be easy for him to prove his innocence—the—the unhappy man! I

will see him—yes, early—before he need send for other friends. You may say so from me."

And Mr. Ffloyd's new legal agent cheered him with the tidings. He had grown very eager and disturbed towards the hour when the prison closed again for the night, and had had thoughts of sending next day for the Reverend Mr. Quickberry, the local preacher of the chapel to which his family went; as if to take devout ghostly counsel, and perhaps seek a mad resource in confession, repentance, fervent emotion, and public expiation. But the Count's answer reassured him wonderfully; and it was not long after the earliest hour of opening the wards of the city jail, when Etherege performed the promise he had given. The interview was brief; more so, than the facilities afforded to a gentleman of his standing might have allowed. While it lasted, the cautious warder stood at hand outside, along with Mr. Etherege's servant—the dusky, taciturn, but obedient Adolphe, to whose actual entrance along with him, as yet, there could have existed no objection had he so desired. All that transpired thus to their ears was the suppressed sound of friendly, though hurried, dialogue; which left the prisoner not only more confident, but much more reserved and prudent than before—Mr. Etherege hastening straight from him to the Mayor.

All ideas of bail, indeed, had apparently, by that time, become out of the question to his worship's

view. The Spring Assizes were close at hand; yet not so near but that due time was left Mr. Ffloyd to prepare his defence. The same forenoon, therefore, he was fully committed to stand his trial on the charge.

The legal counsel by which he had hitherto profited, that of Mr. Jenkins, was not now so readily forthcoming on his behalf: at Mr. Etherege's instance, however, another able lawyer took the vacant place. The former did not himself again visit Mr. Ffloyd for the present; but occasional notes or messages, brought to the jail by the dark-complexioned Adolphe, appeared to imply a belief in that quarter as to his innocence of the formidable indictment. To his warder's eye, the old sugar-baker seemed wonderfully cheered by this testimony: to all appearance, it might be on this account that he refused the persevering applications to see him, of a grave, pale-faced, black-haired gentleman, dressed somewhat like the chaplain, but "more dolefuller;" who gave his name as Mr. John Quickberry, local pastor of Bread-alley Meeting—"whatever that might be." With regard to seeing the Count's valet, or groom, Ffloyd showed a much warmer inclination; but the mulatto—a dumb man, as it proved—had plainly no such orders as to meet the fancy. He shook his head in return, or made signs to say he went wholly by his master's instructions. These did not seem to include anything like interviews between their

bearer and the prisoner. There was nothing secret, or out of the way, in the Count's good offices toward Mr. Ffloyd; who, though so gravely charged, was still a citizen and a subject, entitled to his defence, innocent in the eye of the Law.

As for this Adolphe himself, evidently to the turnkey's view, he had no suspicious private concern about the sugar-baker's case. No fear of *his* trying to slip in tools; no chance for him (on account of his face) changing clothes with another man. A roughish customer, no doubt, at a sudden turn for the keys. But Mr. Ffloyd kept up his heart stoutly without aught like thoughts of the sort, and had his lawyer privately in, and (in those days) his quiet tankard of a night with a neighbour; then there was all the odds in the world, the jailers knew, between committed wards and convicted cells. Whereby, but for Adolphe's own refusal, he might have carried in all his messages direct, if so inclined.

CHAPTER IX.

HARRY SPENCER'S NEWS.

A LETTER from Harry had been looked for, before this time; when it came at length, it reached Beech Grove in a manner, and with a slight degree of additional delay, which require special notice. Addressed as usual to his sister Mary—at the same time, however, for the sake of particular promptness or security, emphatically directed to his father's care at the counting-house—it had been thither duly brought from the head post-office of Bristol, to which the watchful manager, old Mr. Jephson, was perpetually sending throughout all those days and nights of anxiety. He knew at that moment that both Mr. Spencer and Miss Mary were at Wrixworth Hall; the handwriting of Mr. Harry, once familiar enough for a short time at the counting-house, was not yet so altered for the worse by professional disadvantages, but that Jephson's careful spectacles identified it. Moreover, the letter

bore a glaring superscription in red ink (from the hands of H.M.S. *Bedfordshire's* purser's-clerk), to denote and date its conveyance from the Jamaica station by that frigate to Plymouth; the postmark of which town, nevertheless, it did not bear—but judging by the date of arrival there, must have travelled far more directly and rapidly thence by a private hand, than otherwise could have happened in those days.

Late that very evening, in fact, it must have been posted, with an express and scrupulous care, at the head-office whose stamp it showed alone. The lanes near the harbour were not only active with man-of-war seamen from the squadron at King's Roads, while their officers enlivened the politer streets; but there was a rumour of distinguished naval gentlemen who had changed horses at the Buck's Head as they posted through; last arrived from the scene of action, and leaving impressions of some great recent engagement there. Despatches had confessedly been brought along with them to Plymouth: it was said that one of these officers had evidently lost an arm, doubtless in this very action; though he held himself from view, and took a chief share in keeping up their excess of prudence. They went off again at speed towards Bath; one of the postboys, only, having dropped the piece of vague information, that they were to put up at Deepmere Park (a seat of the Earl of Highwood, where, to be sure, his son Lord Beaufoy, lately a captain in the navy, at pre-

sent resided). It was not unlikely that the young gentleman's letter had been so attentively conveyed to post at the instance of the said officers, however dignified their air. A great rough seafaring man, in fact, sat behind the carriage; who, though wild in aspect, behaved himself very quietly, and had acted as servant and messenger to one or other of them while they stayed at the inn-door.

To Mr. Jephson there had been something in these circumstances which cast a rather uncomfortable shade over the letter and its arrival. For, supposing a great battle at sea to have actually taken place—near the spot whence this was dated—after, or even before, it was penned—*what* indeed might it not contain? The public gazettes, certainly, would bring information when issued—at least when forwarded as far as Bristol, which they undoubtedly were not yet. But of course it would not have been pleasant for the family to have to learn their first intelligence of Mr. Harry from such a general source. Even in case of his not being mentioned there, Mrs. Spencer, good lady, would naturally have been much fluttered. And it was no more than dutiful in the young gentleman to advise his friends of the facts—nay, evidently, it was most considerate on the part of some one else, who doubtless knew these facts, to have lost no time in thus forwarding the missive. The worthy manager would himself have hurried up to Beech Grove, and delivered it in person; except for a strong misgiving he felt, lest, in the very mildest

form of the difficulty, Mr. Spencer at the same time being absent from home, his own modest powers of consolation might be too arduously taxed. In the mind of the excellent Jephson, all active maritime hostilities were closely associated — if not with mortal results or great glory—at all events with foreign dungeons or perilous escape, shipwrecks, desert isles, severe wounds or a wooden leg, possibly at best an honourable pension. All this manifest urgency and particularity of the communication deepened his foreboding: though it seems curious,—knowing that Jamaica was the *Cornucopia's* destination, that her cargo was so valuable, her safe arrival still unreported, and that the letter proceeded from the same quarter of the globe,—how its imaginable reference to *her* welfare never once crossed his thoughts.

After thus narrowly eyeing it, therefore—having cautiously handled it, and anxiously turned it over —he next morning despatched it under cover with other letters, as appeared best, by ordinary post to Mr. Spencer's care at Wrixworth Hall, where the proper owner was also to be found. A little later the same day (for concurrences of trouble *will* happen), overwhelmed by that painful business which led to the old sugar-baker's arrest, Jephson utterly let the matter slip from his charge; Mr. Spencer's abrupt return for town in the afternoon, in his attentive daughter's company, producing a further delay in regard to it. From Wrixworth Hall, after due arrival, the packet was returned to

Bristol; where, at the end of this busy week, when the counting-house doors at Froom-lane were near closing, it was opened among others by the clerks, in Mr. Jephson's absence. Amidst his pressing duties to the forgery-case, he was elsewhere required at the time; hence, like the many other letters that could well lie over for his orders, this one of Harry's had to wait quietly through the Sunday. The very day of rest had not meanwhile been unbroken to Mr. Jephson; during its course he had been twice closeted up at Beech Grove, with his principal; divine service had throughout the forenoon gone on without him, in his own parish church, while he was "seeing" poor young Thomson; the evening prayers, nor sermon, had not restored his equanimity: all night, he had dreamt terribly of Mr. Ffloyd, sometime virtual partner in the firm. Early of a Monday, he was always at his post again: the returned letter ere long fixed his eye aghast, and scared him with yet more uneasy thoughts than ever, as he grasped it for immediate delivery at the Grove. He had been within an ace of again leaving it behind—having appointed to go up there at any rate, before the hour when Mr. Spencer could well come into town, in his present health. And breakfast was scarce over at the house, ere Jephson in person appeared; gravely bearing the troublesome deposit, for whose prudent surrender he craved audience apart with Miss Mary in a side-parlour, and seriously explained the causes of delay—ere passing

on to the library, whither Mr. Spencer had just gone.

It happened that, by some swift, maternal instinct, these explanations were rather unceremoniously cut short; for, in the act of the young lady's directing Mr. Jephson to a contiguous glass-door towards the lawn, where Goscroft and her father were—at that instant her tones attracted Mrs. Spencer to the room; a quick suspicion of the truth ensued, one glance at Mr. Jephson's conscious visage sufficed for the result. As he feebly escaped, straightway the precious missive was pounced upon, seized without tolerance for the least further scrutiny as to externals; and, amidst an agitation that might have been called fierce—the careful opening by deputy being alone permitted—was monopolised in a manner so peremptory as to forbid appeal.

"Not one word to papa *yet*, pray, Mr. Jephson," said Mary, again hastening to guide the old manager outwards; "till we know exactly how it is. Any fresh anxiety at present must be saved him, if we possibly can!"

"Yes surely, that it must!" was the devout response of Mr. Jephson. "Goodness only knows, Miss Mary, ma'am, the amount of troubles that Broadby and Co. has been to be got through, of late—but with success, thank Heaven! And I do hope and trust all is well notwithstanding with Master Harry. The vessel *must* be returned home—the truth is, there's something of it in this day's news,

it seems, coupled with the name of Captain Herbert—Sir Richard, that's to say, Miss, who arrived in Plymouth severely wounded. I may as well say at once, suffering by the loss of an arm—and that soon to be followed with gazette accounts of a naval action, most highly favourable to the British, I'm told."

"Can he possibly have been made a prisoner!" faltered Mary Spencer. "Or can anything still worse—but no—no! Try to keep my father in conversation outside, Mr. Jephson. And to the rest—to my brother Goscroft—to my sister Catherine—not even a hint till we know all! I will come to the window, Mr. Jephson, and will stand there, looking to you steadily and nodding—if nothing seems very much wrong! Even then, be cautious and break it to them—only to Goscroft and papa, that is. *They* will come in then. There are also strangers staying with us—I mean, comparatively so."

The old head-clerk beckoned intelligence and obedience, as he passed out. He turned to add, on momentary reflection, that if there were aught approaching to that painful nature, undoubtedly some one of the officers would have at least written along with the letter, if not have brought it—and any little property belonging to her brother, also. Plymouth was nigh at hand. They would never wait, surely, to let bad tidings appear first in the Government lists.

"True—true—bless you, Mr. Jephson! Captain

Herbert himself, if still in life, would certainly have done so," Mary answered. "As it is, he will surely call on us, to explain all? Who knows how soon, indeed, he may be here!" She turned to find her mother still engrossed, though bewildered, by that hasty narrative which the youthful letter-writer had designed rather for Mary's circumstantial tastes, or had most suited to her comparatively experienced intelligence on maritime affairs, as the medium of information to his anxious family.

"I can scarce gather anything definite yet!" Mrs. Spencer exclaimed, hurrying hither and thither from page to page of rather irregular penmanship; which seemed to denote mental agitation, —but was in reality indicative, under a better qualified view, of outward disturbance, varied by unsteadiness in the place, or by pressure for time. "These naval expressions—these fleets of ships with their different names, poor dear boy! Again chasing each other, apparently—evidently firing their guns, don't you think, quite close at hand? See—this seems something worse, even—read it to me clearly—*do!* It floats in a mist before my eyes, Mary—let me understand it all—to the very *worst!* Yet nothing serious can have happened him to the last—there is something about his Captain. But if hurt, himself—*at all*—could he, *could* he have thus hidden it from me! They surely could not have the heart to——"

"No — not the least reason for such a fear,

dearest mother," Mary said; having meanwhile reached over from behind, catching every possible glimpse of her intercepted rights. She gently regained the letter, and glancing over it again to the end, smiled complete reassurance. "He could hardly have written so much, if not quite well and safe, I think. So he *was*, 'tis evident—I fear so much can't be said for poor Captain Herbert! The ship—the *Astræa*—has *not* come back to Plymouth yet. Harry had left it, however, I think—he has remained abroad for the present by his own choice. There *did* appear before, you know, ma'am, to have been some misunderstanding between some of the other young officers and him—nay, even with his captain, Sir Richard himself, leading to a coldness on that side. Harry had fancied so, at any rate—he is all the hotter to take offence, where his warm heart——"

"You shall not say he was hot! It cannot have been his fault—they had no right to allow him to go away!" broke out the mother. "Mr. Herbert freely took him there—he pledged himself, I understood—he—he seemed all kindness, all fair words!"

"But see," argued Mary, showing proof as well as she could, "it was a mere suggestion of Sir Richard's, on having taken him to dine with another captain, Captain Douglas. In a ship actually going back to England—a better vessel, apparently — more likely to offer promotion. Sir Richard wished him, besides, to have an opportunity of coming home and seeing us—which surely

seems most considerate. After that—from what I can make out—the alarming accident took place, not another battle, however, but evidently an accident in one of the ships, near costing the baronet's own life. I cannot see that Harry ran the least risk—he was well enough, at least, to attend his captain's sick-room after the operation, till, as he says himself, 'twas the mere effects of delirium consequent, that rendered his stay out of the question.'"

"Yet what means that about a '*Cornucopia*' or something?" asked her mother, again pointing to the letter. "He 'raved of the *Cornucopia!*' I think it is—and indeed elsewhere, the poor dear fellow himself seems to wish me to understand more of this. Pray try to get at the meaning of these allusions, Mary, as he sets such importance on 'em—nay, one would think, thus endeavours to account for his remaining abroad? Then again, as he writes, 'the captain's mind would wander as before about Kitty'—appearing to have made the very sight of my own boy painful to him! Why should Mr. Herbert's mind wander about Kitty—I presume his sister Catherine is meant?"

"Ah—well—to Kitty, was it? O, some mistake—a chance resemblance, it must be," Mary stammered in answer. "Probably some other name—some sailor's—'tis not an uncommon one with men, you know!" she suggested, most unscrupulously. "Or Harry had no doubt mentioned Kate's often in the cabin—and at least I'm sure Sir

Richard could not have repeated it thus familiarly, even in the height of fever. But the '*Cornucopia*' —why, yes—he says so—*Cornucopia!* Surely that is the title of one of papa's ships—true—the one they have once or twice been so anxious about, lately. Just a moment's patience, ma'am—allow me to read through, mamma, and I shall perhaps understand the whole."

While she attentively ran over the letter, an open window showed Mr. Spencer talking at ease with old Jephson, leaning the while on his son Goscroft's arm; the latter loitering to suit their motions, as he strolled over the mown sward, lingered in the budding and scented shade, noticed the gardener trimming his early carnations, and at intervals spoke a little. The well-kept farther grounds were all spring verdure; the air was musical above; beyond, in the holly-hedged lower gardens, arbour and walk were sprightlier still with the voices of other inmates of Beech Grove, enlivened by obvious views of coming gaiety. Jane Spencer had just passed to join them, already dressed for the day, in a style no less quaint than becoming to her—the huntress-like costume of an Amazonian archery *fête;* the footman brought in bow-cases and quivers, from the target they had been using to the last spare moment. Kate, with a hurrying companion, at length yielded to advices about time—yet provokingly stopped in crossing the grass, to ask Mr. Jephson how his cold was—and stood and reminded her brother Goscroft most

unnecessarily, that, though he might despise ladies' archery, or not care about Mrs. General Beauchamp, still, at all events, to-night was the night of the great new Play. Her eye all the time—though but mechanically, as it proved—resting on the parlour window, as if she noticed Mary's, or caught a glimpse of their mother's attitude within; also at the risk of drawing Goscroft's attention to the same quarter, while he rather emphatically said: "I repeat, Catherine—I think for the third or fourth time—that I shall not fail to join you at the representation in question. But make haste—you are late already—Etherege should have been here by this time. Excuse me if I suggest, that to make a *practice* of being waited for by gentlemen, on whatever assumption, is neither judicious nor *comme il faut*."

"*Mille remercimens, M. le Graduate*—I most humbly thank your wisdom!" she said, with a sharp ironical look. "This time, however, the case seems reversed, you see."

Mr. Etherege. in fact, by a comparison with his recent assiduities, seemed remarkably dilatory in presenting himself; for the first time, also, to those who knew the varying expressions of Kate's features, a slight air of pique appeared detectible there. "We can, of course, reach the Cliff without any cavalier at all, Mr. Goscroft," she quickly added, "and can excuse *you* on grounds of business. Indeed, pleasant as shooting is, particularly for prizes —still I confess 'tis annoying Mrs. Beauchamp

should have hit on the very morning before Mr. Sheridan's piece comes out! Rather than miss the first night here of the "School for Scandal," I'd lose twenty archeries. We are not even sure yet, whether the box has been really secured—Mrs. Beauchamp herself has been too late of applying, yet counts so upon *our* success!"

"Unless she can accompany us, I fancy, Kate," said Goscroft, deliberately, "you girls have but a distant prospect of the entertainment. Since 'tis exceedingly doubtful whether my mother is equal to it—indeed, as I observed just now, yonder, she appears far from well. Were any tickets thus left available, indeed, I think my friend Mr. Hubbard Brodie, Fellow of Oriel, might yet be induced to join me in witnessing the representation. Etherege has spared no pains to procure the tickets—I have no doubt whatever that he will succeed in obtaining some, and this is very probably the reason of his non-appearance at present."

A warmer colour had spread over her face; it glowed up and her eye lighted, as she somewhat proudly said, "I had forgot *that*—yes! And I believe Mrs. Beauchamp *did* mention to Mr. Etherege how she was situated in regard to it. In which case there is little fear. Mr. Etherege actually"—and she laughed it off, as she turned in-doors to dress—"might be fancied to stir heaven and earth for the sake of the slightest passing gratification to—to his friends."

While Mary was still perplexed to comprehend

the whole affair of the West Indiaman in question, poor Mrs. Spencer's restrained feelings made her unreasonable. "Home—his captain returned home!" she cried. "And not my brave bright boy with him—my Harry! I—I—Mary, what cruel *cruel* surprise is this? The Herberts were never cruel before—they were most honourable—he looked it, I had thought! And if he has the —the *face!* to come back here, telling us——"

"Really, really, dear mother," was the calming assurance; "it is plain from all I see, that nothing but the effects of his dangerous wound led to this temporary return. His full recovery was hopeless in that climate; he could not with safety be even removed from the other ship, the *Bedfordshire*—as to his not parting formally from Harry, why, the feeling of awkwardness which prevented it seems to have been all on Harry's side. He says at the end here, 'Sir Charles Douglas himself informing me he had no fear of Sir Richard's leaving the service, if restored by the voyage as they all hoped—nay, that he was like to return speedily to the scene of action, in a post worthier of his professional merits —I was thus of an easier mind on the point, trusting soon to meet again, with the less disturbance to him. The sight of any one from the *Astræa* appearing for the time injudicious, and as it were much better that he require not this, the *Bedfordshire* sails with him at the first of the land-breeze to-night —so I must close.'—But with regard to any idea of Sir Richard's calling *here*," concluded Mary, "I

think, ma'am, we can set ourselves quite at ease—of that there is no danger whatever. 'Tis questionable whether he so much as comes down to Somersetshire—his return there just now might look ill. He has evidently some most influential friends, whose anxiety for his health seems connected with professional prospects only. The truth is, the enemy's fleet appears still so power——"

"What, not call! Not see him in passing, even, before he goes back again?" the indignant mother asked. "It was surely worth that pains!" faltered she, giving way to tears. "How do we know the truth—this letter—I must be made certain that since it was written, Mary——" and starting up towards the window, she would at once have brought in others less prepared for doubtful tidings. At Mary's cautioning gesture, however, joined with another whispered reference to the missing West Indiaman of which Harry wrote, Mrs. Spencer recollected herself.

"Hush!" said the prudent Mary: "Though this is certainly reassuring, so far, mamma, about the *Cornucopia*, still I can only gather that Harry had seen the vessel and recognised it—there is, therefore, no more fear of its having been lost. They had even heard again, of its being seen by others—safe on its way, apparently, to Jamaica. But before informing Mr. Jephson—who should then, considering papa's late health, break the good news to him gradually—we had better first make as sure as possible. Henry does not state that he

had yet been back in the harbour at Kingston, where the merchant ships stay, I think:—however, he rather gives an idea of the *Cornucopia's* having gone on farther. I scarcely understand his odd allusions to an old acquaintance or friend of his, named Dodge—I remember the name well enough —who seems to have been promoted, and to have helped Captain Mallard to take care of the vessel. At all events, Harry appears now to know in what direction to find it—he speaks most confidently of doing so, and of his determination to prove this fully before seeing us all at home—as well as of the wish being kindly shared by several of his comrades who go with him."

The words with which Harry dismissed the subject were these: "*Mr. Holmes being fairly appointed to this fine brig-of-war, and sure to have his Commander's rank confirm'd from Home, as there's no sharper cruizing officer afloat than he—has the Right to take a boat's crew along with him, nor I could not have a moment's Doubt how to choose. Diamond of course goes—as to Bob Jackson, he's to return with the Captain, but there are others of the old hands with us, not far his Inferiours. Little Blakely made up his Mind to come as youngster, so soon as Sir Richard prov'd about to leave—then again, Coventry, after talking of giving up the Service altogether, took it into his Head to exchange into the new craft, which was easy enough. In regard to old Burt (whom I think I've before mentioned), I confess I was much astonish't when he, in his wonted rough and Tumble*

style, managed to get Captain Holmes to have him transferr'd extra—so we're going aboard the Dolphin *all of a small Lump, as the saying goes, like Irish yeast. She's a great change from the* Astræa, *to be sure, and 'tis like we'll all feel queerish at parting from the Ship and company when it comes to the Push—but draws a Deal less water, looks as fast as she's call'd, and what's most to the Point, goes to the Florida station, where the* Cornucopia *was last heard of. It's supposed she's greatly altered cruizing under the name of the* Alligator, *or some such, and has taken some prizes and done much Damage already. But don't for a moment make the least question of* ME *knowing her again!*

"*Pray, Mary,*" added the midshipman in this passage of his epistle, "*convey my most respectfull Duty to our honor'd Father, and assure him, there's a very strong feeling has rose here against such Trix on the part of these rasc'lly Colonials and in particular as regards the whole Service tow'rd Dodge, and it'll not be our fault if the Firm shou'd lose by him. Moreover it may be of Use to let 'em know beforehand at the counting-house, that the* Mary Jane *and* Flamborough *passed us this last tide among the homeward-bound Convoy, quite full, and all well—the squadron in charge being extra Strong, and the Windward Passage reported clear. As the* Bedfordshire *frigate of course will soon take the Start of 'em all, however, and very likely reach Plymouth a fortnight at least ere they're heard of—why, I remember enough of Business to think it's worth men-*

tioning. I've addressed this to Froom-lane, as my father would perhaps think to open it at once—but if by any chance from home, Mr. Jephson will understand what I mean."

"You see, mamma," resumed Mary, "we may be perfectly relieved about his own health and spirits. As to any hidden reason, or even the least likelihood of danger, this leaves nothing to desire. Harry's sole motive has been one of the most natural, as well of the most dutiful and affectionate kind. With regard to his late captain, you forget, ma'am—that is, you, perhaps, do not suspect, but of that there is no time to speak just now—we ought at once, I think, though carefully, to make papa aware. Stay, let me sign to Mr. Jephson—he sees there is something still questionable, and will prepare for it—they and Goscroft will be with us directly. No need for others, though, as yet."

"True, true, dear; these Harrington girls, at least—surely not!" murmured Mrs. Spencer. "Must *they* be told, and explained to, and I know not what besides? Then, this gala-party, too—Lady Diana and her set—even Mr. Etherege himself, who, I suppose, has come, or will immediately! I forget whether you go, Mary?"

"Oh, no—'twould scarce have been suitable to —to my future sphere, I think;" and she smiled, looking down demurely. "I'm no archeress, you know, ma'am; the dress don't become me, either, as it does Jane, or Celia Harrington, though 'tis doubtful if people will think the same of Celia's

elder sister, who wants at least half an inch of my own height. However, 'tis fortunate to be free of 'em all day; we shall be so much the quieter. As for Catherine, though she has no dress—nay, seems scarce to be set off by it—she is bent on being there; and, to believe her, positively *must*. She is certainly counted on—Mrs. Beauchamp would, probably, affront the rest without her—I scarce think we need oppose her, though she were even to take time to hear of the letter at present. 'Tis almost past their time to set out; still, suppose I were to slip up-stairs and let her know at least that it's come, and of Harry's safety? Mr. Jephson says the Government news have begun to be published—she might learn something ere evening, you know, before hearing the whole—and I assure you, mamma, Kate thinks of Harry as much as any of us, though it mayn't appear! Before going out, I think, she really *ought* to be told that much? For Jane's part, it may safely be left to Kate to inform her conveniently during the course of the day?"

Still poring over the letter, and gloating upon its more satisfactory portions, her mother looked up cordially to Mary.

"Always my dear good mindful girl!" she said, more tenderly than common, leaning across to kiss her with a relieved mind. "Yes, Kate ought—indeed she ought. The news are truly precious: yet what—oh! *what* might we not have been destined to read—to hear, rather, from strangers! These excessive spirits of Catherine's, just now,

might even be the better of some slight check—she will hardly, I suppose, choose such a theme to rattle upon, with her friend, Mrs. Beauchamp? Of whom, by the way, none of the rest of us yet know much. To my taste, she is somewhat too splendid a lady ever to become intimate here."

But Mr. Spencer and Goscroft, on old Jephson's considerate statement, now gravely entered. No sooner had the substance of Harry's tidings been ascertained, than his father took the epistle in hand, ran it over seriously, scrutinised some passages with a startled and anxious air, then finally, after a dismayed interjection or two, summoned in the waiting manager of the counting-house. To the merchant and to Mr. Jephson, exchanging looks of distress, of indignation, and of but faint hope in the end, there appeared a meaning in those accounts of the *Cornucopia's* career, very different from that which Mary had inferred.

"Worse—ten times worse than we had feared!" exclaimed Mr. Spencer. "Total shipwreck itself—fire—foundering—capture in ordinary circumstances—would not have lost the heavy insurances! They are now, I very much fear, not worth the parchment they are written on! That fellow, Mallard, the master, deserves to smart for it—should he ever, indeed, turn up again! As for the hope of recapture—of any indemnification whatever—psha! 'twould at all events be swallowed up in the cost. What is our immense Navy *for?* *Why*, I ask, Jephson, do we support an incubus—an

enormous and ever-growing——But this is useless —let us not be unjust to Government, which at present——And after all, my dear, we *did* anticipate some such misfortune in this case."

"Though not as yet advised from Kingston, ma'am, it was somehow half anticipated," chimed Jephson. "The ship ought to have been heard of with the rest, a month ago and more—which it's now highly creditable to Mr. Harry's attention. What's more, Mr. Spencer, sir—it's one of them very anticipations, so to speak, which the House have now fairly tided over, one may say!"

"True, true, Jephson, true," responded the merchant, with returning cheerfulness. "Then, here is some most excellent news besides"—he pointed out to the old book-keeper these subsequent statements of the letter. "The official gazettes of to-day confirm it, but there is much in having such details as the boy gives—the *Mary Jane* and *Flamborough*, full-laden, all well, safe under strong convoy! The wonder is, there are any convoys to spare—but this just now is all-important, my dear. Yes, bravo! Hal—very well indeed!"

"And most satisfactory advices they are, surely, Mr. Spencer!" agreed honest Jephson, looking up almost devoutly as he took off his spectacles. "Some heavy consignments *there*, sir—the truth is, with them and the Mediterranean freights just come to hand, it's a matter I'm sincerely glad to hear of in these times. It goes far to free one's

feet, sir—and if all of 'em was once but well in at the Sea Banks, why——"

"Then the tide might flow with us altogether again, you'd say, Mr. Jephson?" interposed his principal, very graciously. "'Tis ours *now*, man! Come, to our present work again—letters, ledgers, 'Change, Bank, warehouses and wharf-cranes, all of them—not forgetting first, however, this black business of Ffloyd's. I shall be down at Froom-lane on your heels, Jephson! I feel all Broadby and Co. once more—this westerly breeze seems health itself, blowing from the Antilles and the Caribbees! Hey, Goscroft, my good fellow—are you for the counting-house with me to-day?"

A slight shrug of indifference to that occupation writhed through the inactive Oxonian's plumpness of form, yet did his alabaster features softly harmonise themselves to filial complaisance: some actual convictions, as to the necessity of wealth, had of late begun to be forced upon him; nor was he partial to the effort and the glare of *fêtes champêtres*, with burdensome attendance on fair archeresses, to the scene where arrows must be nimbly picked up, and gallantly restored. Ere the domestic council closed, in fact, Lady Die Fanshawe's obvious voice went up from the outer hall; as, after her modest advent in the unfailing sedan, she left orders for her chairmen not to wait. The truth was, Mr. Etherege was understood to have arranged to escort Miss Harrington and Kate on

horseback, his groom attending: such, too, was the presumption of the rustic Beech Grove stable-lad, coming round already with the ponies; while the solid, sober coach-and-pair, always available between times of Mr. Spencer's own necessary use, now began to rumble at greater leisure toward the front. On this occasion—allowing even for Goscroft and himself,—no previous likelihood of inconvenience had appeared on the pleasure-party's account; since the place of business in Froom-lane was but little out of their way to Beauchamp Cliff, on the Gloucester side of town. The more quaintly-attired portion of the gay group still waited on the staircase above,—her eccentric ladyship urging Mrs. Spencer yet, at all events, not to miss Mr. Sheridan's matchless new piece in the evening,—when the lowered voices of Mary and Kate came along below, together passing out to the hall-door. There the latter stood, speaking aloud to some remark of Mary's.

"No—it is a mistake, there was no exact arrangement. As to that, Mary, of course you know yourself he *must* have been unavoidably detained—some accidental cause—some interruption of a friend, possibly. Even if not delayed about these said play-tickets."

"Well—but about this play itself, which I can see, Kate," said her sister, "is the grand object with you to-day—why, I suspect, unless Mrs. Beauchamp is *sure* of a place, you may as well give it

up at once. My mother is out of the question, you see!"

"Mr. Etherege is sure to succeed about *that*," she answered, very decidedly. "He always does. I am certain he will be there, however late. I tell you I've set my heart upon it, and mamma is not to be deprived of the opportunity neither—no—why should one be moped up so at home? *You*, at any rate, can join us to-night—I shall think you grudge me my spirits and fashion, else! Harry is quite safe and well, you say—why, then, how absurd! But don't go any more into particulars, pray, till to-night—when I shall read for myself." She was in a riding-dress, holding up the skirt as she signed to the lad to bring the ponies. "Miss Harrington and I," she went on, "could shift well enough with the escort of Jack himself, who could change his dress and saddle Goscroft's cob, before the coach leaves us far behind."

But her father here interfered, rather peremptorily. "This is not to be thought of, Catherine," he said. "No; the coach, although at some little inconvenience to myself, must now take your whole party—and it can, of course, as arranged, return for you to Mrs. Beauchamp's in the afternoon. If Etherege has thus thought fit to disappoint you, indeed to cause annoyance to all of us—at the risk, besides, of a most awkward *contretemps* with Lady Diana—still it does not follow that I am to permit my fair guest, as well as my youngest

daughter, to ride along the streets and over the country under the guardianship of a stable-boy! This is not by any means, let me tell you, Kate, the only singular—nay, unaccountable—point in Mr. Etherege's recent conduct. Were it only, for the last few days or evenings, his unusual absence from the house, considering how frequent his previous——"

"It happens, I think, sir," she broke in, firmly as well as promptly, "that Mr. Etherege himself explained any apparent inattention of the kind, at his last hurried visit. He has lately had much to do, here as well as in London, in connexion with—with this will of Sir Ralph Herbert's alone, which, now that I quite understand it——"

"You are, perhaps, however, neither aware nor able to explain, Kitty," said her father, dropping his voice as he confidentially took her apart, "the inexplicable facts I have yet to inquire into as regards him. Not only has there been a strange attempt on the part of this wretched forger, this Ffloyd, to claim Mr. Etherege's help—even his support by way of bail—but since then, as I find to-day from Jephson, he has actually visited the scoundrel in his cell, and continues to communicate with him there! Can even *you* account for so mysterious a procedure?"

Again, as before, the colour rose in Kate Spencer's cheek. "Certainly, sir," she said, with some slight confusion, "I can! The conversations which I have unavoidably had with Mr. Etherege,

if not—of a very flowery or—or sentimental nature—could not but lead to some intimate knowledge of him. He has of late frankly communicated to me, of his own accord, not only his peculiar history—the original reason of his coming to this country—but from time to time the singular circumstances of a discovery about poor Mr. Ffloyd, solely, however, relating to Mr. Etherege's personal affairs. These, perhaps, I am not at liberty to state without his express permission. But of one thing I am assured, his own conduct and intentions hitherto in this matter, have been worthy of his undoubted generosity and sincerity towards yourself—towards all of us—and, as I feel bound to say, towards *me!*"

"Be that as it may, Kate," was the reply, "I have really no wish to hurry matters just now. Indeed, I must enjoin on you to reflect for yourself—I insist that you be judicious! Your own trifling little portion, remember, is not *yet* at your own command—as to Sir Ralph's great property, it is still conceivable, always *conceivable*, that some hitch or flaw may yet come out."

"Possibly so," she rejoined, with a marked though distant deference. "I could not pretend to judge of the *certainty* of the expectations. Even as to Mr. Etherege's own actual fortune—though 'twere false to say it has had no weight—yet, all along I took the impression on trust." His speculative scrutiny wavered before her clear eye, as she added, "Pray, sir, believe, it has never been a ques-

tion of this sort—whether he succeeded or not, nay, were all he possesses involved in any—that is, I hope there is *now* no fear?——"

"*None—no*—no, Kate—I assure you, not the slightest," said her father, hastily; all his authoritative air breaking down. "Well, well, you are late, go as you will. Lady Die and your friends are kept waiting. But, believe me, Goscroft and I can walk. I even prefer it to-day, I tell you."

"Since you desire me, Sir," she said, much more gently, turning with him to the unnoticed side-door, through the library; "I shall not, of course, think of riding. The horses had better be taken back—I can soon change my dress." She had been capable of at least declining to go at all. "But otherwise, you will pardon me, papa; it is much too late to trifle further. As people have already said, when they had no right!"

"There is really, perhaps, nothing to alarm us, my dear Kitty," exclaimed he, soothingly. "All may be quite true as regards his title to this property—the lawyers do not contest it, I know—as a Catholic by birth, there may be nothing against his professing that creed to a Jesuit priest, who favours his claim to inherit. What I dislike is this odd interest in Ffloyd's case, during the last day or two! Who knows what guilty implication is thus argued—certainly not in the late crime, but possibly in some former one, abroad? At the forthcoming trial, not many days hence, should aught of the kind transpire—it is not mere defeat to his

claims that might ensue, but some utter ruin, from which flight alone could save him personally!" As he mechanically but anxiously paced the room where he had thus detained her, the light of some higher sympathy seemed waking in Kate's eyes, while she looked at him. "True; I cannot think it," he concluded: "there is much to attract one in Etherege—much to admire. As a partner, I had promised myself no little benefit—altogether, hitherto, there has appeared a transparency, an obvious avoidance of all that could fairly be called pretence or deceit—and it is with great pain to myself that I—*still—still*——"

"No proof would induce me to doubt this, Sir," she exclaimed, warmly, "short of his own words. His look, at all events! Mr. Etherege's look, his conduct, has ever been of that expression to betray him had there yet been aught of dishonour in them. He cannot be accused, surely, of meanness —of *fear?* 'Tis impossible I could be deceived, and I will at once myself put it to him—he shall not be condemned unheard—the world would despise us, else? And I—*I*, you must see, sir——"

"Certainly, he should be sounded and warned—such loose foreign notions will not do here," resumed Mr. Spencer, with sternness. "There can be no great objection to your meeting him at Mrs. Beauchamp's, my love—with this view. I trust I can safely leave it to you—in my own case there would be still greater awkwardness, especially before the trial. Till the result of which is known,"

added he, apart, "I shall really stipulate with her, that no further visits be made on his part. But here is the coach come round—you are not ready yet, Kate. I thought, in fact, you had gone."

Kate looked back at him wonderingly. "*If*, indeed?" she half-murmured to herself, as she went. "If all *were* so, except this strange doubt—except any falsehood or crime—and if they could then still suppose—— No more caprice *then!*" she said, up-stairs, making haste to follow the party. "No —they shall all see there was some heart to give in return. *His* has surely proved itself! I think it was while he seemed always so fortunate, that it chilled me?"

"What are you muttering here, Kate!" says Mary, bursting in to hurry her. "The rest are out of all patience. Still, while I think of it, 'twere as well if you had asked a little more about Harry's news. Though he has left the *Astræa*, he has not come home. But you might happen to hear of some one else belonging to the ship, who evidently *has*—you might even chance, by some accident, to meet him. And there is *one* thing you should be prepared to see, in his——"

"Stay, I don't want to hear more, I told you—by your looks I guessed something already. No; till night, till after the play is over, when all is dull again—no, not even *then*, Mary," she said, hastening past her; then swiftly glided down, passed out, and, joining the rest in silence, was rolled off in their vivacious company.

Mr. Spencer mused still as he looked after them from the outer steps. Within the house, in answer to his wife's expression of some slight surprise at the absence of Mr. Etherege, he replied by a smile of indifference, not unmixed with dignified sarcasm.

"Unusual in Mr. Etherege?" repeated he, still half abstracted, as he took his walking-cane, and received his gloves and hat. "Unlike his devoted manner, you think? Umph—ah—well!" with a somewhat meaning nod. "Since my hurried return from the country, you know, I have not even seen the gentleman. Jephson's dubious account is as yet scarcely comprehensible—it staggers one, I confess. But, for all that *he* did in the matter, this scoundrel Ffloyd might have ruined the house, and that in the very tide of renewed prosperity. Now, too, he absolutely shows the strangest concern for him; for an insolvent, a swindler, a *forger!* What can I deduce from all this?"

Mrs. Spencer had turned pale.

"Is it possible? If the man's guilt is really certain," she anxiously asked, "what, indeed, can the Count mean? I should hope, however, from the very fact—knowing him, of course, as we do——"

"But have you not yourself observed his singularities?" pursued her husband. "To tell the truth, my dear Mary, in any case, 'twere as well to be prepared to meet some obvious change in the Count's behaviour, most probably in his sentiments. Prosperity itself—a position like this of his, observe, in such a country as England—may be exceedingly

apt to turn the head of one really a foreigner after all. But *what*," he inquired with abrupt emphasis, uneasily turning to her, "what of our girl's affections? Are they involved, think you—much involved, that is? For *this*, you may be sure, is what has troubled me in the matter—this is what I would fain know?"

The mother hesitated.

"Kate has for the last few months been a puzzle to me," she at length answered, "nor only to me, but to her fondest sister. It seems she has lately hinted none of those keen things, about our all expecting it of her—she has of her own, I fear, some very romantic notions, but hidden. Mary thinks she goes now upon honour, if not gratitude. Yes; I do myself suspect, Dudley, she has been too far committed in the sense you speak of. All depends, perhaps, on the Count himself. Would it not be difficult, besides, for *you* to——"

"True, true, I have been under some obligations, which—which were at the time painful," he said, moving again to go. "In fact, I think *I* am the party to feel their—their awkwardness or otherwise—and who have alone, let me tell you, my dear, the right to speak of them: unasked as they always were on my part. 'Twere better, however—much better for *all* parties—that they were at once removed. A transaction, happily, now quite easy to negotiate, on the mere credit of the firm. *It*, fortunately, is not open to the suspicion of forging bills; neither, I dare say, is the Count de St.

Amand. The crisis, my dear woman, has, as Jephson well expresses it, been tided over! We are fairly afloat again. The public funds begin to look up—the war, with an officer like Sir George Rodney heading a fresh fleet, must take a decided turn—our chief West India Islands, I hear, are now placed above danger, and the next Jamaica convoy has been well secured. Though the last lesson, I find, was somewhat to my cost. Is Goscroft not ready yet, I wonder? Oh, I sincerely beg his Graduateship's pardon! Good-bye, then, my dear, till dinner-time."

So saying,—while Goscroft slowly joined him, with an eye upon that dusty mile of road,—the Bristol merchant turned his reinvigorated steps toward town.

CHAPTER X.

AN ARCHERY MEETING AT BEAUCHAMP CLIFF.

It was really a most brilliant meeting of the Loyal Associated Artemisian Toxopholites which took place that day in the extensive park of Beauchamp Cliff; where every amenity of the scene, with every hospitality of the adjacent mansion, was liberally placed at the disposal of the company. The *élite*, not only of Bristol and the Hotwells, but to some extent of Bath also, composed it: Mrs. General Beauchamp herself—a widow of almost gorgeous mien and superb carriage, whose taste was yet unquestionable, whose self-assured air had been admirably perfected by travel and Town-life—moved conspicuous through the whole, and topped its utmost pitch of fashion with her own; dispensing her self-willed courtesies and honours, according her eccentric notices, marking out but a few selected acquaintances from the mass

of her somewhat insolently indulged guests, lavishing attention on her two or three peculiar favourites. Miss Catherine Spencer was ever specially of this number, [for Mrs. Beauchamp at all events did not, like poor Lady Die, change her whims with the mode or the season;] and still more marked would have been, doubtless, that young lady's distinguished *fiancé*—as all Bristol now well understood him to be —the absent Etherege. That "the Count" had not attended the Spencer party thither, everybody had observed; that he was altogether absent at first from the gay scene, soon became a fact equally conspicuous. Mrs. Beauchamp had expected him of course; she as naturally missed him afterwards, and openly expressed her sense of the blank. "'Tis absolutely glaring, child!" said Mrs. Beauchamp, in a loud whisper; "I hope, my dear, I have not *you* to blame for it—hey? If he do not appear, I declare I shall even suspect you of jealousy, or some *petite brouillerie* with my beau preux chevalier!"

The chief archery of the day was over by that time, the targets had been left to stray practice of fair amateurs, while a spacious minor pavilion and marquees already stood prepared for the behoof of those invited on the occasion. Even *al fresco* groups of spectators dotted the background, or unknown parties gathered themselves, *à la Watteau*, to refreshments below distant trees. Kate Spencer, bright from the recent sport, though not sharing its fantastic garb,—in fact sparkling from subsequent

proof that a silver arrow *might* have marked her amateur skill—moved beside the swelling mistress of the place toward its central accommodation: some few austerer Amazons and less dexterous nymphs accompanying them; each beyond doubt as to social position, followed by quiver-bearing cavaliers of quality, or by gallant shaft-gatherers whose very names were passwords, their steps shedding honour even at Beauchamp Cliff. Amongst this circle there passed a supercilious glance or two, on some remark of Mrs. Beauchamp's,—not without curiosity as to the blank in question. At which unsuccessful archeresses affected smiles of significance, and Lady Die Fanshawe looked inquiringly to Jane Spencer; while the noble and gallant Polish exile Major Vorniwicz, once more attendant upon them for the day, had now evidently so far mastered the English language and English manners, as to appreciate the words that passed. In Kate herself, however, there was manifestly no consciousness that made the light inquiry awkward to her; she replied in the same gay vein, professing entire ignorance on the point, suggesting its reference to accident alone. Mr. Etherege might still arrive, or not: her spirits were, in any case, again higher than ever,—throwing off, with the day's sport, a shade of pre-occupation and an uneasy glance; till even the excitement of a success so trivial seemed scarcely cause enough for the lustre of her girlish pleasure. Mrs. Beauchamp, who might well have marked this throughout, turned

to her scrutinisingly; she held up one jewelled finger, like a Juno counselling the youngest of Diana's train, and this time whispered something too low to be overheard. Though she said it laughing, it touched Kate's ear like fire, reddening all round from it into view; and she drew back proudly, almost angrily,—stopping still there, erect, lady-like, full of a womanly self-assertion.

"Madam?" she exclaimed almost aloud. "I—I scarcely apprehend you, Mrs. Beauchamp! There has at no time been any reason on my part—none, I trust, on any—why the—the Count, to use your phrase, should doubt—should——" But looking round, she stopped.

"My dearest creature, hush! *Do!*" said the General's widow, magnificently, drawing Kate away. "People will talk, that's all—the world is so malicious—the mercantile public, as they call themselves, more than any! I'd give worlds myself to see you safely set above it. No, *charmante*, I see the fault is none of yours, at all events. Again, hush! Yonder he is himself, positively —come to explain? Give account of yourself, *méchant!*"

Etherege stood on the other side of the tent, and advanced with suitable *empressement;* a little pale, as if by recent late hours, and with a close-set, steady fire of the dark liquid eye from its hollow, which seemed for a moment indicative of gloom. But he duly excused himself to the lady of the place, on the score of a passing ailment; his whole fea-

tures glowed up irrepressibly at meeting Catherine Spencer, more even than his wont was, bowing deep ere he gently took her hand. There was something altogether in his air, of an exquisite delicacy blent with singular deferential lowliness, most unusual in him. As he led them both in to the principal seat at the collation, he said, with a slight melancholy in the accents, "For hours past, Madam, I have been riding to shake off the effect of an inveterate headache—from the climate, merely. England, after all, Mrs. Beauchamp, is death to us tropic-birds—I fear I may have to forsake it for a time—even abruptly." A loud protest from their gracious hostess was his answer; and doubtless he must have felt the hand quiver, that touched his other arm, for he flashed an eager side-look downward in that direction. Her avoiding cheek, first whitened, then crimsoning again, offered no distinct sign in reply; she was steadily silent till they took their places, where nothing but the gaiety of the occasion was reflected from her open face.

"Shocking!" repeated Mrs. Beauchamp, energetically—"but you jest, *mon cher Comte?*"

"*I—jest!*—no, madam—no," said Etherege with a polished smile, but firmly; and there was indeed a sombre hollowness in his tone. "Besides, my letters call me, ere a few days, to Paris. I must quickly be there, if I would guard against a danger, the consequence of—much depends upon it."

"How shockingly ungallant, I had almost declared! Yet, nay—I perceive—'tis but a little peremptoriness, such as you men must be excused, I

fancy, in affecting?" And the lady playfully tapped him with her fan, as he took the tray of ices from a servant, to hand it to them amidst the animated confusion. "Ah—to Paris? True—'tis there this war is least heeded," she ran on. "'Tis the one only spot, just now, where real seclusion and privacy can be enjoyed! Absolutely, we are too crowded together here at present—not to allude for a moment to the common herd, and the droves of nobodies. 'Tis sickening, my dear Mr. Etherege—I admire a choice made with your usual taste. Still, we shall be anxious about you. We are most of us —if we've seen nothing of campaigning, that's to say — such wretched cowards about fleets, and pirates, and frigates with great guns in them, that your return will be rather uneasily looked for! The fresh charms of the old scene must not detain you too long, though, mind ye!" She caught Kate Spencer's eye, from amidst the lively attentions of a pleasant neighbour: "You can have no notion, my love," she added, pointedly, "of the charms of Versailles and the Palais Royal, or how time flies round the Champs Elysées!"

"I fear not, Mrs. Beauchamp," laughed Kate, unconscious as to their previous words. "Unless from the Abbé Horne's description, at old Herbert Court. He painted them in such colours, that I own—next to my brother Harry's account of tropical sights, 'twould be tempting, even on the way *there*, to—to—— I mean, when the peace comes—when old stupid England gets past endurance, that is! 'Tis still bearable, though, is it not, ma'am?—

really, we are quite gay here! I think, now, were there a little dancing on the soft turf, before we leave, 'twould be perfection—one could still enjoy it a little longer! When one goes, really it should be altogether—somewhere far off—to something beyond comparison splendid and transporting. Not to come back and dream here again in the shade, do you not think?"

"Ha, ha! True, Miss Spencer—excellently well said, I vow," chimed in an admiring young man of fashion next her. "Our gracious hostess will pardon us if we urge the suggestion? A thousand thanks, Mrs. Beauchamp, from every gentleman here—Miss Spencer, permit me—the orchestra takes the hint already, you perceive, from your slightest wish!"

"The strange madcap creature that she is!" whispered Mrs. Beauchamp, leaning on Etherege's arm as they followed out. "Yet, to keep you among us at present, cannot I count on aid *there!* To bring you back, at all events, very——"

"Once *gone*," he answered, emphatically—with his eye still on Catherine's figure before them, and a tone that reached her ear as she moved on,—"I know little of my return, except that ties of kindred and of connexion, doubtless, have their force. Meanwhile, from Paris I shall sail for the western tropics, where my property chiefly lies. It is worth the defence which may become necessary for it. There is even a spell for me, madam, in that wide ocean of the West and its clustered isles—Elysian bowers they are, peaked with the azure of a real

paradise—which may, perhaps, console one, though *alone*——"

"Ah! *Alone?*" repeated the superb widow, ironically. "Come, my good St. Amand, I have already left off being romantic. *Others*, it may be——" She looked towards Catherine to add in an under tone —"but no trifling, I beg, with my petite Spencer, *bourgeoise* though she may be."

Etherege eagerly met her pointed glance, and deprecated it with a gesture. "*Alone*—yes, Mrs. Beauchamp," ejaculated he, vehemently. There had been a repressed passion about him since his appearance that day, which now broke out, under cover of the surrounding gaiety, in unwontedly eloquent accents. "Were it at my choice, *can* I ask it—abruptly—in this unexpected mode—when half my fortune is endangered, though English interests grow secure again! And I well know their prudence—their selfish shrewdness, madam! While, as to the war, it is precisely in the quarter where my interests are involved, that it rages—the chief hazards lie there. To-day, by the gazettes, it appears that Admiral Byron's fleet, including the frigate recently commanded by my gallant relative, late Mr. Herbert——"

As he spoke, it was plain that Catherine Spencer listened through all the sounds, through the very dance-airs preluding over the throng: she stopped short as *he* did, without turning,—indeed still kept her unconscious partner's arm with a nervous touch.

"What is it you were about to say?" she asked, with a sharp, imperative quickness that astonished

those at hand: "Tell me—I heard you, Mr. Etherege, but do not fear to speak plainly—has anything happened to—the *Astræa?*"

"Her brother's ship—true!" recollected some of the Beech Grove party. "And there was a letter from him this morning before we left, it seems," Jane Spencer said, leaning faintly against a tree. "None but Catherine knew aught of it—they told us nothing—some dreadful mystery—pray—pray, do not conceal it! End this terrible suspense!"

"I assure you there is no cause for the least alarm," replied Mr. Etherege; while a dubious satisfaction relaxed his intense notice of their looks. "How shall I forgive myself for pausing an instant in so inadvertent a reference,—which I thought every one must understand! The news are public, Mrs. Beauchamp—your city must, by this time, ring with the *éclat*, I should imagine. 'Tis merely that an engagement had taken place, in which my cousin received a wound—the loss of an arm, leading to his unavoidable return home, where he now is, I believe, although I have not yet seen him. The disadvantage of the action lay with the enemy, it is understood,—notwithstanding that one or two trifling islands, occupied by the French, evidently remain in their hands." He left his hostess to compose the fair Miss Spencer, and inform Lady Diana; while he hastened to Catherine's side. "Can you really imagine, Miss Kate," he said, lowering his voice to its gentlest, "that if

aught in the least unfortunate had occurred, I could have breathed of it in your hearing! Nay, in that case, you must see at once that you could never have been allowed to leave home to-day, even for *these* festivities! I could not myself guess, certainly, that a letter from your brother had arrived—the earliest gazettes, however, it might have been thought—— But to-day I have had distractions of my own—can you excuse me on this account, if on no other?"

Her momentary attitude had passed, although the sense of his words scarce seemed yet to gain her full attention. The seriousness of the occasion was truly such, that her courteous young partner tacitly surrendered his claim on her hand for the time, to the understood privilege of the Count St. Amand: and, ere Mrs. Beauchamp had had time to turn the *contretemps* to merriment, it was but natural that the proffered arm was mechanically taken. Till, slowly passing aside from immediate notice, they were free to speak.

In the first excited moments, every vague supposition had occurred to her, relating to her brother's ship, that could follow from news so ambiguous, though so grave. It was useless to hide, had she tried, the continued flutter of her spirits, the sudden distaste to these gaieties of the hour, or that utter inability to rejoin them—to meet their stare again—to wait there for the return of the carriage from home. She was, indeed, almost wildly impatient that they could

have got back at once to Beech Grove; conjecturing, she could not well say what, as to the reasons for her sister Mary's caution—the things that might not even have been known there, at the time—the possibility of subsequent disasters to the ship, if not of Harry's own abrupt return, as formerly with Black Diamond.

Etherege's steady and thoughtful knowledge of the facts calmed her much; from amidst evident effort, on his own part, to be at ease. While his deep, melodious tones thus explained and soothed her, she noticed him more closely than before, that day. The traces of fatigue, of late business, of very recent pain, if not of a present struggle for self-control, had indeed worn the sculpture-like regularity of his features; taking off the dusky glow of health, though his full eye glittered but the more vividly from its hollow shade. He did not as yet inform her how it had chanced, that he knew enough of all the circumstances in question, to reassure her concerning them; he had been deeply occupied, indeed, throughout the morning; his time was still so much engaged, that evening, as to preclude his stay any longer at Mrs. Beauchamp's. Notwithstanding which, if she still wished to hasten the departure of her party, he offered at once to ride back to Beech Grove, there leaving the necessary message for that purpose. He had himself brought no coach, not even his servant. It was, on the other hand, however, possible that among the carriages in waiting, near the lodge-gates, some

friend's ready aid might now be found, to convey her sister and herself straight homewards.

From the direction they had taken as they spoke, one gateway of the park was visible, thus blocked with equipages; whence it might have been easy for him to obtain the favour suggested. If, in fact, there might not be some convenient hackney-chaise available among their number. But she had been convinced by that time how groundless was any uneasiness; were it otherwise, the truth was, Mrs. Beauchamp's own carriage was, of course, at their immediate service: as to the other kind offer on his part, it was now unnecessary. Since Mrs. Beauchamp, indeed, counted upon their waiting, she preferred it rather—her first rash impulses recoiling from home, perhaps, as soon as he had proved there was little to learn there—no fear—nothing great to expect. Nay, so far from her having taken him at his word, as to his own hurried leaving, there was in her manner something to detain him while they retraced their steps. She was silent,—the coming and going of her fluttered breath was perceptible; yet the increased remoteness from other hearers seemed only to suit her wish. Nor did it strike her notice when she at length spoke, how slight a movement might seclude them beyond general view.

"I heard you lately saying, Mr. Etherege," she all at once began, "that it was probable you might soon leave England. From your manner, indeed, and your tone, it seemed to me a quite determined

purpose—though certainly it is a very sudden one. Of course, in the circumstances, somewhat to my surprise. I think I am bound to ask *why?*"

"It is needless to conceal," was the gloomy though no less prompt reply, "that on my way here—being in town, and having important reasons to see Mr. Spencer at his place of business,—I was for the first time made aware of an altered feeling on his part. Not only is his mercantile house inflexible to a request I made—supported by another influential establishment, the only other concerned in the question—but personally, I can observe, there is an utter change. Your father, Miss Catherine Spencer, even communicated to me the substance of a very recent conversation he had had with yourself, which, if I am rightly given to understand——"

"It is not from this alone, however," resumed she, with a manifest haste to be explicit, if not to forbid the haughty reference to that quarter,—"it is not anything *then* said, Mr. Etherege, which could so offend you! The other question, I presume, had to do with that unhappy Mr. Ffloyd—whom you suspect of being so guilty in regard to your own rights—your duties, it may be? It is in connexion with *this*, you have been led to decide as you do?"

"It is—yes. Yes," he admitted. So swift and almost peremptory had her look run before her words, that the assent was inevitable. "True; but there is no longer the shadow of a doubt," added

he, no less resolute than pale, "of his being identical with Coguel. This impostor, this *forger*, recollect!—whom I ought never to have spared, even at the risk of his falsehoods under a public trial! Nor for the sake of his offered reparation on my behalf, when he affected *remorse!* It is not—even *now*—that I fear anything in the result, which I need shrink from. The restored documents themselves had been already tested, and found genuine —and this miscreant's odious assurances of their authenticity seem to have been even repeated to Father Joseph, my late grand-uncle's confessor, the most experienced and accomplished of priests —in fact, a Jesuit—who at least professes to have renewed confidence in them. Still, hitherto, he had not the dread of death to madden him —who knows to what desperate expedients he might yet resort, if guilty in this recent matter? I confess it was chiefly in this view—although I cherish no vindictive feeling against the wretch, —that I had hoped your father, Miss Spencer, would be induced to waive the capital charge against him, if not to recede altogether from the prosecution. This, it seems, up till to-day, might have been contrived. I was ready to compensate, as concerns the pecuniary loss. There is a growing disinclination to capital punishment for this crime, especially as the innocent have occasionally suffered. It is *now* too late, and——"

"*You*, then, would have spared him, while my father—but I do not require all your reasons," said

Catherine, vehemently. "No—what now I ask you, sir, is," while her clear eye loftily searched his, —"is it true there can be anything in the issue which you *ought* to fear? Any undue sensitiveness, any shame or dishonour or conscious fault—that should force you away abruptly?"

His glance catching at hers in turn, he raised his head and met it with sudden eagerness.

"Can *you* for an instant have imputed this to me—anything of this!" was his passionate rejoinder. "It *did* seem that all had changed—that England was not to be the Utopia, the paradise I fancied. Everything became again questionable! The truth is, I do not trust this Mr. Osborne Smith, this Father Joseph. Candid and liberal though he appears, the stony eye of the Jesuit occasionally shows beyond. And, were a doubt thrown on my higher rights *here*, he is, perhaps, capable of meditating my utter ruin, by some retort as to those I already enjoy from *abroad*. No time is to be lost in guarding against this, and I was only about to do so—to secure personally the fullest proofs from France, from St. Lucie, from Jamaica and Cuba themselves! Although, indeed, the danger is scarce evident yet,—and the trial of Ffloyd, of Coguel, would first have to prove it real."

"Why not wait the result, at all events?" she coincided. "Why take alarm, perhaps so unnecessarily, at the idea of these Jesuit designs,—when you can thwart them if they take place? Unless I mistake the circumstances, I can't even

see anything wrong in not *appearing* to suspect them! I would neglect no proper means, but I would not incur doubts by going abroad. There is no country, surely, where justice is so certain as in England, or where plots have less effect,— but even otherwise, even stripped of fortune, is it not the place most suited to retrieve this? Think you, Mr. Etherege, you have no friends here who would honour you all the more,—who would shame the thought of deserting you *then?*"

Simply as she might have meant it, with a tone of self-possessed resoluteness besides, yet her colour rose very vivid after the words. This, at least, Etherege was too much moved to observe; none but a fool could have presumed on the earnest meaning, the ardent counsel. His attitude was slowly swayed and bent aside from her, under its rousing force; his eye by turns sought the distant cloud, the ground he stood on, the neighbouring shade, while she thus adjured him; every slightest motion, every tense sinew, testified to a struggle that passed within.

"To remain—to *remain?*" he thus echoed, with a husky indistinctness. "It were nothing to give up this new wealth—it was never sought—I had already resolved so. No more of these priestly casuistries, in fact! They would tempt one to profane what he is asked to adore,—and that, too, at the moment of one's beginning to place some trust in creeds! What, indeed, were even the robbery that might follow—fortune itself! True—they

might be defied? But to *remain?* You do not know why I must fly, though—you would not understand it were it told. For it becomes plain that there are demons—yes, demons—within—*without*, rather! but too hideous to oppose! Unless—unless, indeed——" He had turned towards her, doubtfully, all but hopelessly: nothing was said by the settled paleness or the troubled and wandering eyes he saw. "Pardon me, madam,—the charge seems now true," added he, bitterly, though with evident reference to himself alone, "that in the blood of our race by the English side, there is some vein of madness! A chimera it may be—a horror of fancy—each may have their own danger, perhaps, but I must fly it! It is *you* who teach me to do so; who kindle the failing strength for it. If I should remain, it must be for ever! The demon were indeed powerless near an angel!"

"It would be idle to affect to misunderstand you," Catherine said, with an effort. "I know yet of nothing to make me retract my word, deliberately given. I did not *then* conceive it to depend, Mr. Etherege, on questions of this strange nature! Nor—can I—*now*."

Her passive hand, as he seized it, continued there; chill but tremulous.

"Can it be true—can such rapture be yet hoped for!" broke impetuous from his lips, pressed upon the pledge with a homage none the less deferential. "Angel *indeed!* Paragon! Oh, Catherine, you have saved me! The balance of my fate

trembled. I had doubted this after the coldness of —of others. My pride would have released you, but now——"

"Your conduct has been truly generous—noble —I have been deeply sensible of it," she hastened to say. "And if my deep gratitude—if my esteem is to be enough—but *more* I cannot—*cannot* offer! No—no—it is from no base desertion, yet you now make me feel how impossible—I could not be at all to you what you have said! Can you need such aid as this—as *mine?* You have a generous soul, Etherege—forgive me, rather, when I ask—but did you not say you released me?"

Sudden and irrepressible, a sob burst from her; the tears sprang as her hand was still retained. He would have knelt, entitled at last, perhaps, to have folded her in the first clasp of a lover so impassioned; and she only evaded it, where they stood on the abrupt hill-brow, by turning silently that way. If the charge against her had ever been made with any justice, that she had trifled like a girl with this suit of his at the outset, she seemed fated to make amends now.

"Release you, fairest, dearest one!" repeated the impetuous young man, with all the deep-toned fervour of emotions that were carrying him away. "With my own will—with my reason—never! And when it is *you* who have thus proved constant—*you* who rise superior to every doubt? No; I remain at all hazards: it seems now a mere frantic supposition, which might have impelled me from your

side! Nay, at the worst, I feel confident of soon justifying this choice. You shall have no cause to regret it, Catherine! If you question this, however, let me go only first, to make it certain—to secure the fresh wealth, the splendours, that shall surround you! Promise only the same truth—promise to write to me in return—and that when I reappear——"

"There is no need," came the hurried response, without turning her head to him. "How could things be altered now by a little absence or delay, if they are so fixed as this? Were you to go—as you say, for a time—no one else, at least, is now likely, I can assure you, Etienne Etherege——"

In what she was painfully and slowly about to tell him, she stopped short perforce. Other detached pairs or stray parties were scattered, indeed, through the park, as its gay assemblage began to break up; though none were at once so obvious as themselves, and so pointedly safe from intrusion by noisier groups. The voice of Mrs. Beauchamp herself, leading home her most select friends, now skirted above the wooded walk where the two had stood; yet was passing with marked whispers, to let them follow alone. The house itself was in fact nearer now: and, moving that way mechanically, not without some angry colour, the young lady had already left Etherege no choice but to escort her thither. Even on the narrow and broken path, his aid would have been superfluous to her firm step, her elastic footing, and quickened eye.

"To go?" murmured he apart, as she preceded

him. "Still to *go!* But it would be in this way the madness would lie. I should never again—true, that matters not. Ah, Kate—*Kate!*" he wildly burst out on the sudden, "why could you not have measured the depth, even half the depth of this passion! So precipitate, it may be—so agonising—so fierce, perhaps, but so adoring! At the end, I am asked to be content with gratitude, with esteem! How is it,—yes, once for all, *tell me?*" There was a desperate peremptoriness in the tone, without any ruder accent: he came to so abrupt and stern a stop as to arrest her very breath, seemingly; while again she stood still and listened to him, less impatiently, with greater respect, it might be, than ever before.

"I have at least gained that right; let it be conceded, and all is done! For, though it has never appeared—though I have even seen no one to suspect—still, there may possibly be some *other*, before whom I ought to yield? I would endeavour to do so duly, with the requisite self-command—at all events I could then tear myself without further reluctance from England. I will not for a moment presume, Madam, to inquire further as to this supposition—no—grant me no more than an assent, silence itself, and I bid you at once farewell! It may in fact be some one of whom I know nothing—perhaps absent, and only remembered indirectly—apparently heedless, it is true, but possessing merits to which *I* cannot pretend! The sole advantage in *my* favour," he concluded, with seeming calmness, "has been from

the side of your family. But this may have been really detrimental to my suit — it may after all have promoted the cause of another. Believe me, painful though the surrender to addresses so cold, so cautious—I will make it, Miss Spencer! Pray give me credit for being capable of it."

Whatever the changing shades on her face till then, they had been hidden from him; his measured courtesy of expression, on the other hand, was not so careful that it could have disguised his real suspicion, his secret impulse too, from an ear like hers. It was now she turned full on him, glowing out the loftiest amazement, the most superb denial. "You have *no* right—I have given you no grounds—to no one have I ever given the least pretext to say so, Count St. Amand! 'Tis false! Never again dare breathe—to *me*, sir—to *any one*—such an insulting thought!" With one firm foot advanced, mutely stamped, as it were, against him—her nymph-shaped form erect—a face all indignant strain, and eyes uncertain which way to dart their anger, the girl stood over him while he bent towards her. The flash of Etherege's dark eye sank, yet hung ecstatic to the imperious attitude; there was a strange rapture there, as if at the mere sense of obedience to her bidding, which nevertheless brought out the marked beauty of those eloquent features; while through the graceful mien, the half-foreign elegances of the day, there stood forth lithe and real, yet wholly at her command, all that intense savage energy which

had been ever discernible in him. "No—I was wrong, wrong indeed," the words broke from him —"you might well refuse to pardon me! I spoke but at hazard—yet never again could I dream, never could I for an instant venture to utter in your presence——"

"To no one—not to any one else on earth, sir—you shall not hint this, nor ever imply it in any way!" she sharply insisted, piercing his glance with hers. "I will have the condition kept to the letter—no paltering with it. *Where* is it you must go so very hurriedly, to-day? If, indeed—but you do not know, Etherege, what I could find in my heart yet to—— No one knows—I begin scarce to know, I think, myself!"

"It was simply on the slight affair I before spoke of," he said. "I give you my honour, *yes*—an errand that had already passed my memory. If necessary, I will prove it by still availing myself of Mrs. Beauchamp's invitation here. On *any* terms, be mine, adored one!" pleaded he. Moving on with him slowly, shutting her eyes hard, she pressed a hand to her neck as if for breath; with the other dropped wearily. "'Tis a slave who implores it—a worshipper—one who lays all at your feet, stipulating for nothing, *nothing*, except the hand that contains his bliss! Oh, Catherine—peerless, unutterably-loved Kate! share my fortunes, go with me — for perhaps it were better, safer on *that one point*. On *it*—in England, here—made desperate—at the mere thought of a rival—there

might then still be a risk of disobeying even *you!* I have fortunes still, I repeat—at your slightest wish, I would bring you back—you could not for ever be cold to my devotion, my——"

"How can you be sure, though, Etienne Etherege," struck in her rapid question, with a startling plainness, "that if I say it—if—if I am to marry you—instead of proving what you think, and what it indeed ought, it is not to be a deeper danger, a misery, a curse to you! I have heard of such things, when there has been on either side any—any want of fitness. I feel as if—after such thoughtlessness, such wilfulness, so much change—as if I grew reckless—as if——"

Truly there was something in her excited face to have warned an ordinary lover. Fain to have made itself out Medea-like, hard in tone and ominous of eye, it nevertheless more resembled the pathetic young Antigone, or too-scrupulous Clarissa Harlowe when she first eloped: with a tear about to follow, and the rich hair ruffled out of powder below her plumed hat, and the folds of sweet lavender-coloured muslin agitated—(such folds as little Fanny Burney demurely wore, according to Sir Joshua's portrait, stuffed in above her walking-dress, almost to the chin). Etherege only soothed the doubt by a deprecating whisper. The path was steep, and he assisted her to mount it; as yet, drawing her on without aught to suggest a bolder thought.

"Then, let this be ended!" returned Kate, with

wild impatience. "I care not how quickly, too! When is it—would it be *soon* that you could leave?"

The first eager words of his reply were almost stammered, nay incoherent, in a delight which she but little heeded. They had risen above the shaded walks in which fashion was still promenading, beyond view from the flaunting throng of the lawns as it dispersed. A slight smoke close by, yet lost in sunlight, alone showed where the mansion was sequestered; the other way, over deep outer dells of elfin-land, opposite the rich Leigh woods in their spring greenery, shone up the reach of Avon from Rownham Ferry, with its crossing barge,—and the rude sounds, though not without a romantic echo, of vessels from the hidden city-port, that were towing or tiding it down. Looking round, if likelier means were needed for an eye so keen as Etherege's, he could see the nearest lodge of the park, astir again as carriages began to leave or draw up at hand; and well might he have asked himself, whether it was in the power of man to throw away, if not to misinterpret, the dangerous temptation of her crowning waywardness?

"Nay—why should I hesitate!" he went on, quickening as he turned to her. "Were all I leave behind me at stake—were it lost to-morrow, there is the amplest certainty for what remains! Secured beyond doubt—my rank acknowledged and confirmed, with fresh honours, restored estates—soon to return in prouder——"

"Not to return—no, Count, that is fixed—*never* to return," Kate said, very firmly. Her eyes were set far upon the keen crescent of the Severn Sea, which was lifting to their view at that height, like damasked steel above the uppermost twigs, flecked by a distant sail or two; the curved Avon winding unseen into its expanse, the higher masts of the anchored squadron at King's Roads alone telling of their proximity under the coast (where recruiting views had brought them, on the pretext of a lately-threatened attack from the West).

"Yonder, at least, glitters the magic way!" he ejaculated. "To the fresher world—to the tropics, whose shining waters I know so well! *Alone*, indeed, how desolate, how drear—yet how softly roll their azure billows, fairest Catherine! Along the track to warmer suns—to enchanting starlight—to delicious island bowers where a hundred slaves will contend to bring——"

"Happy sea—wild, restless, rough sea!" she was murmuring, as she shared his gaze. "To escape with you and get free altogether, and not to be blamed for changing and changing ever so! Harry is the wisest of us—he chose it early, Mr. Etherege," she said, with abruptness, "and went back, you know. I wish I had been *he*—what a stirring time must he have! But I had forgot—yes—as you say, what is there to care for at home, at Wrixworth, anywhere? I should soon be near Harry—I would get him to come often and stay. If *he* returned, true, perhaps I might for a little

too. But whatever were thought of me, at any rate when they write to *him*, when they think of him, they cannot help—even my mother——" Her voice swelled too much, indeed, to reason out the argument in Etherege's favour.

"Think, too," urged he, energetically, "think, dearest one—sweetest! of the right I should have to welcome him, or serve in any way the noble boy! There can be nothing dear to you, for which I should not long! Meanwhile, how grand to spurn the idle preliminaries we leave behind us—which are leagued, perhaps, with the malice of designs against me! To rise above them in triumph—to have the *power*, at least, of crushing them with scorn! Believe me, adored Kate, I feel the kindling of such a force within me, which waits but your smile to fan it into flame! I could be great—I could compel you to be yet proud of this love! Come with me—come!—delay no longer—in spite of circumstances, of opposition, of fate! 'Twas my own mother's destiny, to which she remained constant. Those, too, who dare question that destiny, I will yet force to repent—they shall soon tremble at the very thought of doubting it!"

The glory of the spent day bursting up wide upon them there, Etherege's passionate attitude caught a momentary dignity; the warm light, flashing upon the girl's dazzled face, softened it towards him as he spoke, however vaguely, half-understood, of undeserved wrongs he had to retrieve. "I shall not, of course, now rejoin the party

—I cannot!" she exclaimed, readily turning aside by a new path to which he had led. "Till our coach arrives, the lodge shall serve me to wait in. If you will only have the kindness, Mr. Etherege, to let my sister know this? Oh, for the present, home!—*home*, if only to despatch and be gone. I am not equal to any more etiquette, any more ceremony than need-be—I——"

Still entreating, first, to be allowed to see her safely at the gate-keeper's house,—which she knew well enough,—he hastened on by her side. Speculation is needless as to the immediate course, or ultimate effect, toward which her mood might have been swayed by his animated persuasions. The present opportunity was rendered fruitless, at all events, by their sudden vicinity to a noisy trio of still more bewildered ramblers, whom the same secluded path had led astray. The distressed voice of Lady Diana Fanshawe could not appeal for help in vain; with the exiled Polish Major and Miss Celia Harrington both dependent on her guidance, in quaint archery costume and in gorgeous though tarnished uniform.

As Kate advanced beneath the tangled bank, and called them down, while her ladyship welcomed the indispensable aid of Mr. Etherege in descending, it was the latter who alone betrayed any embarrassment or annoyance at the meeting. On the part of Lady Diana, however, there were feelings too evidently similar to consist with her wonted bent. For though she had long ceased to

view the very whims of Kate Spencer through a partial eye-glass, those of the lively Celia Harrington were far from justifiable by the boldest chaperon; particularly when indulged, without fortune in the young lady's case, towards a too-gallant Major, who, along with somewhat veteran honours and the most hopeless territorial rights, only combined a very sanguine belief in the future of his country, and actual increased success in the tuition of languages. A hasty excuse came from Celia as to their wanderings; that Major Vorniwicz had been kindly engaged, of course under Lady Diana's approval, in teaching her the steps of an ancient but most elegant dance of his native land, called the Polska ("which, like many other superior products of the Slavonic genius," he now added, "was unknown to the rest of Europe!"). To this, from its circular movements, they jointly attributed the fact of their having lost the way to the house: a pretence at which Kate, as Celia's more responsible friend, thought fit to frown in rather a too-mature style; doubtless presuming, though the younger of the two, upon her position. "Still I do vow, my dear, we were making our way," said her Ladyship. "Every one can't be so *au fait* as yourself, you know, in this fine wilderness of Mrs. General's! I forget whether the great dame specially invited *me*—but 'tis unavoidable my going in, I fancy? And as for Major Vorniwicz, who has been polite enough to offer us his attentions to-night at the Play, I know 'twill be most welcome."

"The house does not stand this way," was the composed answer; "I was not going there, Lady Die—I rather wished to hasten home. But—since you incline to stay—true, I was near forgetting Mrs. Beauchamp's anxiety about to-night, as to the theatre. Though, unless a whole box has been secured——?" She necessarily looked to Mr. Etherege on that question.

"It was,—last night, happily, I was able to effect this," he said; the cloud passing from his brow again. "*Nothing* could have forced me, I assure you, Miss Spencer, to neglect the wish of our hostess—and on my first arrival to-day, I informed her of my success. Although, on my own part, not likely to share the pleasure. It now grows so late, that I am obliged by business to ride home at once."

Another unnoticed instance this, truly,—in Mrs. Beauchamp's gratification regarding the new play, —of those unsparing yet delicately unobtrusive pains which proved his love. Lady Die in vain exclaimed at the idea of business, even legal business, on the very eve of the first performance, in Bristol, of Mr. Sheridan's matchless piece—business that might perhaps risk his being too late for the spectacle of "The School for Scandal," ere its bloom was further soiled by a second night!

"Our own coach can of course be told to wait for us a little!" Kate admitted. "Mrs. Beauchamp, I believe, too,—in *this* case,—would expect to carry some of us back to town."

"I will gladly leave the message, in passing

Beech Grove," he assured her, bowing as he turned again to go. Naturally, the two were left for some moments near each other. "*You*, too," whispered Etherege, "will surely avail yourself of the occasion? The pleasure of having procured it for you would be something, at least!"

"Do you not mean, then," she doubtfully asked, —with something of the same anxious scrutiny as once before,—"to be of the party? I had understood there was no business of such an urgent nature, as to prevent—— I sincerely trust, Mr. Etherege, that—that no groundless idea still lurks——"

"It was simply, that against my will I might be detained," answered he; fain to have met all the force of her evading look, and to have been sure he could wholly claim its warm confusion for his own. "Trust me, it is the merest business—they are the most strictly legal affairs. However late, too, they shall not prevent my reaching your side for a little, at the Play—for you will promise, will you not, to be there?" Almost as if acknowledging a right or a command, she bent her head and assented. "Till then, dearest Catherine, adieu!" closed he, stooping over the hand he touched; though the glow of excitement on his face as he went, was soon mixed with the gloomier air he had brought at first coming.

Mrs. Beauchamp's companies were always vivacious, always enlivening; she herself had that airy knowledge of life and high view of the world, that

imposing force of will—infused into weak thought, —and those specially flattering manners, — enhanced by a more general defiance toward people at large,—which came like balm and cordial to Kate Spencer at the time. How gaily did the hour or two pass, that still intervened between the archery-meeting and the theatre! They tended to console one for silly girlish regrets, and turned the views forward to a career of brilliant maturity, whether abroad or elsewhere.

She and Jane were driven back with Mrs. Beauchamp herself, just in time to reach Beech Grove, and dress, and drive round again to the crowding scene of the night, in King-street.

CHAPTER XI.

THE "SCHOOL FOR SCANDAL" HAS FOR ONCE A SEQUEL.

THE expectations raised in Bristol by the announcement of Mr. Sheridan's new play, the "School for Scandal," were more than realised by that night's performance. It was fresh from the metropolitan boards of Drury Lane: the author himself had, in fact, come down to Bath to superintend the rehearsals of Mr. Palmer's excellent company there, —who now sustained the principal parts. All Bristol and the Hotwells of Clifton had rushed to the wild contention for places; they had pressed for mere standing-room, they had besought passage-space, secured doorways, gained peep-holes from the back-lobbies, and perches of oversight or eaves-dropping from the stairs, the stage-beams, the air-holes of the roof, the pillars of the galleries—till

the new theatre in King-street was bursting full into every lane, through which excluded mobs fumed round. Within, the success was triumphant indeed; the audience hung attentive on every glimpse of that new and sparkling reflection of the manners of the day, which Irish wit had again furnished to English taste; following each scene with a murmur of delight, closing the several acts with irrepressible marks of approbation. Disappointment, outside, only clamoured and grew confused: the city's blending noise, absorbed by the wide spring night, reached through the unshut entrances, blocked up with obstinate rabble of hangers-on for stray pass-checks and for the popular afterpiece: but all this mattered nothing, so long as that too-moral Joseph continued to titillate all genuine sensibilities of Bristolian virtue within, and the curtain delayed to fall over that honest Charles's generous sentiments, and that charmingly-endangered Lady Teazle proved correct after all, and was to speak her smart epilogue still.

Etherege had come in before the first act closed; using his opportunity, in the pause, to exchange some few words of eulogistic comment with Mrs. Beauchamp, and to lean over behind Lady Die and Jane Spencer, and make a low-voiced remark or two, merely critical, for Catherine's ear. Her professed enjoyment had been already great, her fitful spirits seemed to be checked by the conspicuous place alone; though certainly the day's fatigue and excitement had left her very pale, while as to

her seat, it was a corner one, in the back circle; and even there, the noise, the glare, the sea of faces, appeared to make her shrink from the least interval in the piece. One would have thought, as she moved her fan, that she was as flushed as Mrs. Beauchamp, or that there was no air from the door which Etherege opened behind—that when he found an opera-glass for her, she did not care like the rest to know who was there, or only trifled with it to prevent others from its use. His keen glance did not need this help, and its restlessness was obvious. Indeed, he soon observed friends in the distance, with whom, he said, he wished to speak for a little; and a brief glimpse of him could accordingly be caught the next minute, behind an opposite box, as the play went on. Among the large audience, as was natural, not a few officers from both services were present; the nearer stage-box was occupied by the Commodore of the squadron in the Roads, with the well-known Lord Beaufoy beside him; and behind, a group of naval uniforms filled the remaining space: so that, where certain reasons for uneasiness toward that quarter were best founded, they arose afresh in view of it—at the total absence of Mr. Etherege from the main passages of this sparkling play.

However, before the storm of applause in which it closed was over, he reappeared at hand; seeming to have lost but little of the truly-dramatic composition, and of its scarce less able rendering by the company. He was in full time to praise it, and

join his cordial vote with the loud demand which brought back Sir Peter, her Ladyship, Joseph and Charles, to receive their uproarious meed of commendation, and bow their heartfelt thanks.

After that, the recoil came. The full boxes and packed stalls relaxed from their flush of satisfaction, with wearied looks, and movements to go. It was indeed suffocatingly hot; the pit rose and stretched themselves noisily, the whole upper-galleries were a scramble for distant oranges, there were rude figures stretching over, there were rough seafaring fellows welcoming them from above—climbing in to mount the pillars; and reckless man-of-war sailors with gorgeous handkerchiefs, with bottles which they flourished, with gaudily arrayed female companions whom they made conspicuous—all crowded terribly to notice in the chaotic interval. Yet it was most difficult to leave—carriages outside seemed to stop the way hopelessly—the crowd in the street appeared to press on the outer doors and choke them, riotously enjoying the fact: slow, dreadfully slow, was the motion of the Beech Grove party, from their front dress-box beside Mrs. Beauchamp and other friends, who had already almost resigned themselves to sit out the lighter drama. A bucolic-nautical piece it proved, as the curtain rose on its opening; ere the Spencers and Lady Diana gained the box-screen door, with strenuous help from Mr. Etherege and Major Vorniwicz. As they stood in the obstructed back-passage, waiting yet, while the Major gallantly strove to pioneer

in every direction for their escape, they might have solaced themselves still by retrospective glimpses of a tavern-door and sign on the left wing, with rustics dancing; and could not but hear how the upper-gallery muttered hoarse censure, larded with sea-oaths, when the disguised pirate entered from his steed. It was a performance designed in compliment, doubtless, to the maritime warfare of the day, to the vicinity of a squadron in the Bristol Channel, to the local interests, and the recent zealous theatrical patronage from naval authorities at hand; in part accounting, also, for the vast number of the lower orders of that rough profession then obviously present, sturdily triumphant over exclusiveness,—if not for the sprinkling of officers in blue and white, whose grave intentness had shown honour to the masterpiece of the night.

But now it all seemed resulting chiefly in a crowd too dense for endurance within, and in a state of dissatisfaction without, which threatened to grow boisterous beyond municipal control. Faces turned here and there, on which the beginning alarm was perilously depicted—figures tossed up, struggling; from any of which, at any moment, a cry might break, to the hazard of all. A panic at that minute would have been terrible; and Etherege, drawing close to him the two ladies who depended on him for protection, could not well repress the dangerous energy of the Polish Major. He himself silently urged them towards a neighbouring door, careless whither it might lead.

The Major was lost sight of, with Jane Spencer and her friend Miss Harrington. There was yet a breathing space, in whose dead, hot interval, that rustled out steaming from the crowded merriment at hand, it was strange to hear what unconsciousness of their situation transpired from contiguous voices. "Ha, ha!" from eager maritime spectators within — "not bad, old landlord! — I bet, though, *you* don't twig he's a pirate after all, till the next hact!" Some excluded townsmen gossiped patiently, meanwhile, on their way in, with broken sentences that were half lost against the emerging crowd.

"Like to cheat the gibbet, did you say, neighbour? *What!* It's not a going to be hushed up, is it, after all that's been said? As for that young Thomson, gammon! — if *he* ain't a innocent, I'll——"

"—Can't let him off *now*, I'd say, if he was the Mayor's own father! No use pushink, gemmen—none. Then, there's his bangruppcy—a swindle, if ever——"

"Having lost by which, I ort to know, I think," resumed a first voice, gravely. "Hush, though! Han't ye heard? There's a turn-up at the gaol about it, just as I come past—Mr. Quickberry, his own Methody preacher, been sent for an hour before, after tryin', they say, all the week to——"

"—Come, friends, don't keep a-shoving—time enough! He's clearly guilty, then, of course—but

who'd a thought it of old Mat, that he'd give in, much less take his life in that fash——"

"A moment, Lady Diana!" exclaimed Mr. Etherege, while he drew them through—"that door, there, must be forced—this becomes really dangerous! I thought I heard some madman hint at fire on the stage, or in the green-room!"

"—Not sure—but poison bein' found on him," continued those other ominous voices:—"no knife as yet, though, which they was kep' strict from him—here's the difficulty, no doubt? Yes, in course, Mr. Quickberry went in, I tell ye.—A black footman, they say.—*Whose*, though? Mightn't he ha' *used* it, if he brought it?—Drat it, man, ask the tipstaffs or the mayor, if they're in time—the old man was goin' fast, I was told. More likely it 'ud be his poor precious soul he'd got to think of, than yer disclosures that ye talk o'—— No chance to get in here, though!"

"We can't stir, I say—I'm goin' out!—Keep back, for God sake! there's a door—it's the Count, his honour's forcing it! Ay, ay, your lordship—here goes!"

The door burst with a crash before Etherege's efforts, backed by such aid at hand—the effect of authoritative signs with which he had seized, if not heightened, the emergency. His voice was lost in the ensuing whirl of alarm, as it was swelled by the shrieks of Lady Die, whom others echoed; a rabble of besieging expectants had pressed up the stairs toward the gallery, and augmented the peril.

"Fire!" some now yelled in earnest, while others shouted "Murder!" and "Constables!" The roused audience, from within, were breaking forth in sudden dismay. One bewildering moment was Catherine Spencer aware of, when Lady Die's hysterical clutch was torn from her dress by a strong and determined hand, and she herself, raised in a vigorous clasp, was borne high into the torrent of leaping, staggering, rolling people—mad with fear and selfish love of life, where rude strength buffeted its reckless way to safety. Her sight, her breath, her very thought seemed gone; till the air broke upon her outside—the sea of faces was still tossing beneath, storming round, swaying and eddying through the high narrow lane, under the flicker of unsteady torches that were lit or extinguished by turns; while at one end the street raged like battle, at the other reared and trampled the scared horses, and the carriage-wheels strained and grated amidst frightful din.

"'Tis the sailors forcing in—the drunken liberty men, d——n them!" shouted agitated voices. "Read the Riot Act!—send for the cavalry!—where's the city guard? Oh, Heavens—where are their officers?" "Here, here, here!—they are coming! This way." "Ay, ay, no fear," thundered a voice; a boatswain's shrill whistle followed, joined by others in piercing chorus: till the confusion lessened visibly, and a band of stalwart man-o'-war's-men, the press-gang of the harbour, with the fire-engine behind, began to stem it down.

"The Commodore's coming out, men—the Captain was with him, so look out for squalls—avast there, I advise ye—here, tumble back, you lubbers!"

Mr. Etherege, panting, had set down his precious burden, supporting her yet; he drew breath, and bore her with a tireless energy onward into clearer space. The carriages were near at hand; Kate gained sight, as from the boiling abyss, of their lamps and inner furniture, and recovered herself so far as to utter a broken word or two.

"Where, where are they?" she asked, helplessly.

"I know not—safe—yes, safe," muttered Etherege. "Let me save *you*, though—and I care not, dearest—for ever dearest, let me place you beyond danger!"

He was ashy pale, bloody, torn—she could not help returning one anxious look, more like gratitude than before. Yet at Etherege's strong gesture, she stopped to look round for some sign of the Beech Grove coach, or of Mrs. Beauchamp's equipage being near—some possible token, it might be, that the others too had gained its proximity. There were hackney-coaches only within reach—he urged her towards them: even her sudden self-possession and peremptory decision were unnoticed by him, as he drew her strenuously on again, shielded and overshadowed by his clasp, through the still-fluctuating pressure.

"Nay, I repeat—we take the wrong direction!" she ejaculated, faint with the effort. "'Tis the

other way! I must insist—Mr. Etherege—*Sir!* Let me stop—stay—I think I see? Surely there was a call yonder! What can you mean by this—this force! Sir, I——"

Raising her once more, with a vague assurance that all was right, he bore her forward; the faces that whirled round gave no heed, or rushed leering by; the clash of coach-steps at hand, the oaths, the agitated interjections and scarce suppressed screams, would have drowned her voice had she raised it. She mutely gathered her energies, as the wild medley was cleared by dint of a force on her protector's part that seemed frantic, almost superhuman. At the narrow turn, by its kerb-post, where the wheels were swerving dizzily by to the main street, her feet touched the pavement again; Etherege leaning like one exhausted to the wall, yet still pressing her, anxiously, carefully, safely towards him.

"I now know where we are," she said, calmly, though with a writhing motion to be free. "No fear—be good enough, sir, to trust me to my own efforts. The crowd is sufficient protection otherwise—I shall not move, believe me, till you find our coachman on the other side, if—that is—if I do not *already* owe you too much!"

The expressive glitter of his look so answered her, while he yet firmly retained her arm, that if she could, she would have sprung from him into the rushing thoroughfare.

"What mockery to ask!" he bent and mur-

mured to her—"No—no—have you forgot? All —*all* is at your feet, dearest—beloved—darling one! But you are mine—by all earthly right *mine!* Aye by heavens—by hell's own too, if such there be! I have played a high stake for this prize! my Kate! my angel!"

"You are seen—have a care!" she answered; keeping down her voice too, though he resistlessly drew her towards him, trembling. "There are people I recognise—I see sailors at hand—officers —I hear them—perhaps men of the *Astræa*, my brother's ship! Come, I still spare you, Sir! Let me reach home, at least! Till then, 'tis sheer extravagance on your part—sheer folly, Mr. Etherege! *Madman!*"

Drawing in to them, round the other turn of the lane, there suddenly appeared a post-chaise and pair, toward the door of which Etherege snatched his companion's powerless figure. A dusky visage met him through the shadow; the mounted postboy looked stolidly down. "Quick, Adolphe, the door, the *door!*—To the devil with the step, sirrah—shut it—tear the glasses up!" hissed out his master. "To the King's Road way, boy—cross the bridge—keep to the river!"

Her single shriek had broken out as she was lifted in,—shrill, intense, thrilling up through the tumult and disturbance of the night, so as even to draw notice thence. But it had ceased all at once—shut in—stopped midway by the daring abductor's own strenuous clasp, by his very lips,

by the wild agony of dismay that fell upon herself, crushing her senses down as the wheels rolled into the central din. As she lay thus passive, the mulatto servant seating himself within, and ceasing to cloak up and smother the windows, it must have seemed to them that she had swooned away.

"True, true!" the Count answered to some inarticulate or pantomimic hint from Adolphe. "Let him turn the other way, then! I knew it—that hound Herbert was near; seeking her eye, for aught I know—hovering about us. 'Tis the Wrixworth road, leading to his old country-seat—ha! my fine cousin! Yet, too, *would* to the fiend we had met! I could have spared something for that luxury!"

The air gushed on Catherine's face; the sound of the streets rushed in again, and noise of men, and sound of carriages. It was the street toward the new bridge, which took to the old well-known Wrixworth road; and Adolphe was leaning out, gesticulating uncouthly to the postboy as other vehicles appeared in front. It was then she sprang up, screaming to stop, and, in the confused pause that followed, desperately caught at the wild possibility brought up by their words. "Help! Oh, Herbert—Sir Richard Herbert, save me!—the *Astræa's* captain, men of the *Astræa* if there *be* any—help! *help!*"

In vain the groping hands against her mouth, the quick shutting and stifling again, the rapid driving and turning into that cross street. Before

a neighbouring window some men had been standing, near a travelling-chaise ready for the night-road; and there was a sudden hue and cry, a rapid chase, and a stoppage at last.

Amidst the unintelligible protest of Adolphe, and the Count de St. Amand's haughty orders, backed by threats,—some naval officers appeared to the summons from their men. "The *Astræa* was hailed, that I'll swear!" said a rough voice. "And so was the captain of her!" "Likewise, yonder his honour is, to answer for himself—what *does* that lubberly jockey mean by his *loonattics?*—mad ladies be blowed! No more a mad lady than we is—come, strike yer piratical colours—clear out o' this, d'ye see, my masters!"

"What means all this, my men?" inquired a deep-toned voice, and a figure strode from the dusk into lamplight; tall, strong, shadowy, with one commanding hand raised, the sleeve of the right arm folded loosely to the breast. He sternly faced the infuriate Count's levelled weapon, beckoning it down, and identifying him with a slow surprise. "My cousin Etherege! Count de St. Amand, I believe I ought to say? *You!* No need of force, men,—fall back. I know this gentleman, who will explain matters to me. Perhaps there is some misapprehension on my part, Sir. But that appeal—and to myself, it seems—*how*, I must insist——?"

Making determined way, he stood close by the chaise, and bent to look in; the strife ceasing at his presence, while the obedient seamen welcomed

inquiry, and muttered some quick explanatory words.

It was, indeed, the flushed, troubled, grave and sea-worn face of Herbert, that met Kate's speechless gaze, where she had sunk back overstrained; her dilated eyes fixing wildly on his much-altered face, and the yet more marked change in his stately figure. Not another sound or motion had risen from her as yet; it was as if, till then, she acquiesced in the Count's statements, whatever these might be,—nay, was now dizzily putting up her hand to clear a bewildered brow, and had but broken out at the first in some hysterical alarm. But at the anxious question of his eye, wandering back to her from the voice outside, she again named him in a scared, faint whisper; by the plain old Wrixworth appellation, though.

"Yes—yes—is there any way, *Madam*," he said, with a stress upon this title,—while by her air and attitude she might have suggested to him an uncertainty as to her real mental state,—"is there any possible way in which I can serve you?"

"Yes, back!—home!" she rapidly exclaimed aloud, with her face covered in her hands; the full agitation returning. "*You* can now take me there, can you not, Sir Richard? If Harry—if my brother were only near—but I forgot!——No one can doubt your conduct, however; we never questioned it—it *must* have been all honour; I have perfect faith in you!"

Utterly uninformed of all that had passed,—

under a natural supposition, indeed, that the time first appointed for her marriage had been kept,—Herbert gazed at her perplexed.

"Surely, madam—but, whither? *Home*, you say? I scarcely yet understand to what place? Yet, compose yourself, I beseech you. I will have your wishes carried out to the letter; pray, be calm!"

The continued signs of Etherege had been significantly expressive. The inquisitive mob began to separate in disappointment; while the carriage moved slowly forward, as Herbert walked beside it. Closing the door gently, he soothed her—almost as a child is soothed. They had turned into a different street, where the floating sounds of the docks and harbour, that had begun to be audible, were lost once more: the Count's dark valet had quietly mounted on the chaise, Etherege himself accompanying it closely, while the man-of-war's-men, at a hint from their superior, had turned to their own course again. Sir Richard leant in, still walking by the wheels; she had said nothing further, seated there perfectly still, her white face shaded by the vivid opera-hood,—the relief of tears being, moreover, too deep, the disorder of her lately-dressed hair too obvious, to be seen through by him.

"One thing I must explain," he hurried to say, "to which this occurrence, I am told, has been partly due. Your brother Henry—he is in perfect safety. Believe me, we parted warm friends; 'twas his own choice. Yet I own, *I*, too, wished it—

I——" She looked quickly up, the surprise glancing through those tears of hers. "Nay, nay, don't misapprehend me," added he: "That bright, generous boy was the frigate's favourite; all loved him; he will soon be nobly heard of. In our late action, he distinguished himself more than his own accounts will tell. I should very likely not be here to say so, but for Henry,—shattered wreck as I seem!" Kate looked at him then steadily though he did not see it, and smiled; a wondering, lustrous, wilfully satisfied smile. "The truth was," he pursued, turning yet more away, and reddening, "I loved him myself dearly; I believe I must have feared it was too much so for a commander—who, especially, you know——"

"True," she said, hastily, but still looking up to him; "yes, Sir Richard; and then, I dare say it is possible that Harry presumed."

"No. No. It was when I heard—after the sudden news, I mean—'twas somewhat hard, madam, to look forward to having him still thus beside me. His face, his very voice——and so—and so—no matter; his friends will give my intentions credit, I trust. So now—*now*, accordingly—and——" He stooped inwards to take her unresisting hand but for a moment; in reality, that they might part.

"But I cannot—*cannot* still have you keep thus on foot, Captain Herbert!" she faltered. "Surely, we are not near home yet; 'tis full two miles. Do not walk—you pain me by it!" As she half rose within, leaving more room, there was a contrary

movement from him, however, of pain that was yet more manifest than hers.

"It must be over; pardon me!" came his hurried answer. "I leave you now safe; there is, I hope, no further cause for agitation. You will not leave England yet; not till you wish it, and can bear the—the trial better. Be calm, madam, I have his own pledged word for it—my cousin's—your husband's——"

"Leave England! His word! *Who?*" she whispered aghast, with his parting fingers caught fast in hers, starting up madly in the carriage, bent on throwing herself out towards him as they moved faster. "*His!* Is he not gone? Is it possible that you did not know, or that he misled you? *Villain!* See! Take care! Save yourself, not *me!*—no—no! O Herbert, Herbert——"

Sudden and bitter as was his cousin's springing thrust, it had only missed him by the over-zeal of the dark servant, Adolphe, lashing the horses into speed with the postboy's whip which he had snatched. At the furious offset, Sir Richard's life had not been more perilled than Catherine Spencer's, when she half fell between the blow and him; but vainly as he caught her with one arm,—scarce keeping the desperate pace for a few moments,—some harness-trace broke from the frightened beasts, they swerved to the kerb-stone, and hurled the reeling chaise aside at their mad heels. Herbert staggered to his feet,—not too late to save all apparent harm to his precious burden, unconscious

though she was; the full truth then first glimmering on him. Etherege himself, who had partly shared the risk, stood lowering by; his too-devoted attendant, with a fractured limb, groaned on the causeway; while the nimbler postboy, having been quick enough to avoid the catastrophe, was already profiting by the experienced aid which rushes from all British street-lanes to such distress,—and answering a brief inquiry or two, on the matter at large. Re-attracted seamen, who had followed, were hastening up: even the street watch, equally notable for absence at these times, began to approach; more than one apothecary or surgeon, too, had been run for; and another hackney-coach rapidly drove in, as they were setting up the fallen vehicle, preparing to lift in the chief sufferer by the accident, and re-yoking the quieted horses. Adolphe, amidst his violent pain, made evident signs to his master, that he needed no further delay,—indeed, was still eager to accompany him, and share his darkening fortunes.

"Thank God, she seems but to have fainted," said Sir Richard Herbert; having himself placed his unconscious charge in the fresh coach. "There are signs of recovery. Though the faster you drive, my lad, all the better! You know Mr. Spencer's—Beech Grove, I think? Yes, yes, I will see to the lady, myself."

Etherege now moved to him, as he was about to step in: between the anxiety and the rage that were working within him, the young man still hoarsely

questioned his cousin's claim to this privilege; in spite of all that had passed, or was at least known, he was wild enough to attempt urging his own right. Baffled there, his tone changed; the sting of its sarcastic manner carried an obvious sense.

"To be plain with you, Sir," answered Herbert, turning to him firmly, "I have only begun, as yet, to comprehend the drift of your mad design. After the cool plausibility of such a statement as you lately made to me, I cannot but incline to doubt *all*. *Cousin*, you say? Well—it would seem so—indeed, so far as that may go, there are sufficient proofs, I regret to allow. But evidently, from what I hear, with some painful mystery below the—the——"

"Your meaning—your meaning by that hesitation?" was the fierce demand; intensely low and cautiously, though, with glances cast behind. "Is this lie of a murderer's—which a Jesuit may have guessed—or perhaps a vulgar fanatic has encouraged—is it to be repeated, Sir? It is a *lie*—you understand me! Where can I find you to-night, Sir Richard Herbert?"

"I have no time to say more at present," said the latter, impatiently. "At any hour to-morrow you can find me in town, here. The truth is,—though understand you I do *not*,—I shall be among the very first to expect to do so."

"*To-night—to-night*—let it be *to-night!*" cried Etherege, vehemently. "Of *to-morrow* I know nothing—no—you see, do you not, that by to-

morrow I dare not—dare not——" In his reckless temper he would even have got up before the chaise. There stood near, however, a brawny figure in seaman's clothes, who, at a sign from Herbert, was getting up there already, and now checked him with a Herculean hand.

"To-night, sir," returned his cousin, with sternness, "you have already raised a coward blade on a disabled man. I trust—as to not facing the light of another day, you wrong yourself by such words." He shut the door, and told Jackson to bid the driver lose no further time: the chaise went off at speed, leaving Etherege amidst the gloomy street.

"*To-morrow?*" muttered he, darkly; but yielding to the moaning restlessness of the unhappy Adolphe, the postboy's complaints, and the growing sympathy of bystanders. "To the harbour, then," he called out—"to the harbour, fellow—quick! The same quay, yonder—the same sharp red lugger-vessel you were told of, lying by! "*To-morrow*—no—not so soon. But do not think you are done with this, my cousin!—and—and *you*—hateful, beautiful—hateful as you were beautiful! Bitterly shall you both answer—I know not yet how, but I feel it!" He writhed apart on his seat, slowly collecting unknown energies, out of ruin: while Adolphe almost shrieked with anguish, at the pace they went.

"Wretch!" broke out his master, turning a moody eye upon him. "If you suffered as *I!* You forget, perhaps, that *your* flight must needs be the

speediest—it is merely from a falsehood, a shadow, a phantom, that *I* escape! But for your weakness, it might have been otherwise—if you *must* have had revenge, why did you not strike deep, fool? I only told you it was *Coguel*—did you not sufficiently hate the assassin, the liar! Was it by his look that you were daunted? Do you still persist in the denial—even the doubt—that it was *he?*"

The dumb man's swarthy face was turned to him, still obstinate though devoted, amidst increasing pain. Adolphe's condition, indeed, rendered hopeless every idea of his transport from the shore, without surgical aid for a time. As afterwards appears, his fidelity and attachment had been such as to need no protestations, in regard of clearing his master from all suspicion on any crime of his own.

It was manifestly no fear of this, by which the latter was hurried on: the mere sight of the mulatto's uncouth gestures, of his written wishes, of his looks, his very parting affection—perhaps of his pain—seemed far more insufferable to the Count, than any delay they caused at that decent though quiet tavern in the harbour purlieus. All possible secresy as well as care had been secured to the unfortunate man, ere he was thus left. Wind and tide not favouring till past midnight, when the moon rose from over the Channel sea,—every busy dock-man or porter, watchful custom-house officer or wary seafarer, could have testified to the sequel, on the public quay. The lugger was bound to run, no doubt, for St. Maloes; but without legal ques-

tion as yet, on this side of the water. They expected the Count on board; but it was openly, with no appearance of their helping off a fugitive, or huddling a spy over. Indeed, some knew the Count by sight, many learned that it was he, all thought that he had fought some duel, or, rather, bore important government-papers, perhaps the preliminaries of a treaty for peace. Till the last, the vessel was too motionless and private for him, catching the moonlight on the clean deck off the open water—the busy wharf was too shadowy and restless, with the tide working in, and the wind along the lane. One-while, wrapped close up, he strode swiftly to and fro—another while, his cloak flew open, and he was standing quite still—again, he wheeled to look for some one, who did not come.

"Detested soil!" he said, as he at length turned to embark, heedless who heard—"soil where alone this was possible—where a foul *lie* like this could breed, could crawl to the light, could rear its slimy coils above one's head, to glare ruin upon him! Abhorred island, where that lie will rot, *dead*,—begone, sink from me! Until—until——? Happily for you, the ocean surrounds you, but there are other powers who claim power over it, and who hate you!"

The tide was full, the river gleamed, the breeze fluttered toward the wide night-air: Etherege was looking fixedly seaward as they floated him that way.

CHAPTER XII.

A DARK CHAPTER—ADOLPHE'S GUILT.

CIRCUMSTANCES had already transpired at the city-gaol, in connexion with a most painful occurrence there, which, while plainly implicating the mulatto valet of the Count, were far from throwing the least shade of suspicion on that distinguished young nobleman himself. The people at his inn were quite aware of his intention to travel for a time, followed as usual to London by this dumb but serviceable attendant, who had long been attached to the family. It now appeared that, during his master's absence, the man had stealthily gone out, while engaged in the necessary preparations for this journey; he had come back before the Count's return, in a manner more distinctly noticed, though equally surreptitious. This fact in itself was now felt to have been suspicious—one of the chamber-women recollecting that he appeared to be rather in liquor; an extraordinary thing in Adolphe, who

was always very well-conducted and sober. He had then remained only long enough to pack up a few articles, which he gave to a porter; finally giving to understand, in various ways, that he was about to be dismissed, and would go to London: but he had not been supposed to intend this so suddenly as the case seemed now to prove. The Count's own prolonged absence was not as yet imagined to imply anything more than ordinary; as his hours had recently been irregular, not only from the fashionable society in which he mingled, but through legal business. In the direction of London, therefore, the mulatto would have been sought; but for the subsequent incidents of that night, which were next day notorious enough.

Old Mr. Ffloyd, after the common meal of his prison-ward on that fatal evening, had retired alone to a sleeping-cell at hand; where he still was wont to indulge the private habit of an after-dinner nap. The mulatto valet on that occasion—although always previously indifferent to an interview on the sugar-baker's desire—had been passed in at his own instance as if at last to hear what Ffloyd would say. He had quickly returned, however, through the social noise and evening exercises of the prisoners at hand; briefly indicating that Mr. Ffloyd was then asleep—a pretext audibly confirmed by the old man's stertorous breathing,—without anything to be remarked on his own uncouth dark visage, in the dusky passage at that late hour. Ffloyd was only found on his bed by the warder at lock-up time, insensible from loss of

blood, and in a dying state. He seemed to have fallen or thrown himself over the knife, and, after it clotted, to bleed inwardly; this was a gag sufficient to keep him mute, for it was fast choking him. Though, before death, he explained that the murderer—at whom he had only time to take one stare—sprang out from against the light, and, instead of crying out, he himself had struggled desperately with him. It was during this contest, while the villain smothered him to get at the knife again, that he had stared so,—in fact, contriving to *say* something at a guess; and there was a tattooed mark on the wrist of his own right arm which might have proved what he then said, to one who knew him personally. Owing to which, he supposed, he had not been at once silenced for ever. Hearing that it was the dumb mulatto, as he had conjectured, Ffloyd said that Adolphe might *well* be scared at recognising him. The stroke had been sufficient, however, as it was; the gaol-surgeon who assisted to bring him round thus far, scouting the turnkey's stubborn charge of suicide in the case, had summoned in a fellow-practitioner to bear out his views. And though a small phial was found at the same time,—acknowledged by Mr. Ffloyd himself to contain some of the deadliest poison, along with the grave avowal that he had meant to use it if found guilty at the assizes,—nevertheless, as a dying man, he eagerly assured the governor of his perfect innocence hitherto, in *this* sense. He did not now say anything to the authorities,—as he had *before* taken every op-

portunity of doing,—about the falsehood of the other accusations. He did not need the doctors to tell him the lugubrious result of their consultation. He knew it well enough: he was going, and that fast, —indeed, it was plain that neither styptics nor sleeping-doses could do much for him, if he even lingered out the night. Had he not been a pretty strong man in his prime, and had latterly a deal of blood in him, he was well aware he could not have held out as he did. He all at once asked, oddly enough, if any of them remembered how the tide then stood at Bristol Sea-Banks; and, being with some delay informed that it was marked for flood in the month's dock-bills, he asserted with confidence that he would last out high-water, but most likely follow the turn of it. Meantime, he did not want to be drugged any more, merely to die in the dark toward morning. It was not the first time he had faced death, and a man must know some time or other, at any rate, what it was. As to the general anxiety to apprehend the murderer—so soon as his deposition had been taken down, he did not much seem to share the feeling, and would not swear to the man's identity or his name. He laid stress on the belief, that, if he were right in his guess—the turnkey's self-contradictory evidence appearing only to try his patience—in that case the thing must have been done on a mistaken notion. It was too late, he thought, to bear a grudge against a man for a blow through mistake; the more especially as it

freed one from the company in Bristol gaol, under a turnkey who, to say the least of it, was not always so civil as he made himself out,—possibly with the risk of a stone cell, on bread and water: without speaking of what came after. Mr. Ffloyd said he had given a sharp blow or two himself in his time, and might well put up with one at the end.

During this brief interval, strange and almost indicative of the clearest guilt as his words were, the imprisoned sugar-baker's appearance had undergone a great change—to the effect of procuring much deference for his wishes. Propped upright with the whitest pillows on the mean truckle-bed; the whole ward being virtually possessed by him; a formal audience of officials and magistrates being gathered before him, as to a court; while every means and appliance had been used to keep up his strength, and shift away the ghastly proofs of the crime:—he faced it all, too, with a superior importance. The Mayor of Bristol, Sir Timothy Pickford, one of its wealthiest citizens,—who had known him well in better days,—had arrived in haste from a highly-respectable company at supper; kindly moved by the consideration of poor Joseph Thomson, the clerk, whose doubtful case might never now be cleared. The worthy mayor would fain have had Mr. Ffloyd set his own mind at ease, and make his peace in a higher quarter, by declaring before those assembled what the truth of that matter was; at least by adding to his deposition

some definite statement on the point. But Ffloyd waved him down peremptorily; he was manifestly too absorbed in singular thoughts, after having imperatively prevented his wife and family from being sent for. He had allowed this, indeed, in the case of Mr. John Quickberry, the local preacher; who had come before in vain to the prison-gate, and was at last with difficulty found, but hastened breathless in ere he was well announced.

"Not that he thought *now*," he said, hoarsely, with something resembling an oath, "to make the sort of peace they would prate about. If he were to babble and blab for ever—aye, and *run blood* as long!"—he had wildly hinted to the good, terrified mayor that such peace would not be granted. "Even if *they* believed him, where he was going! No such fools *there*, I fancy, Mr. Mayor?" concluded he; turning on Sir Timothy an unaccountable look of speculation, most unearthly because it seemed to jar with a still more dreadful satisfaction. "No — no such fools, I fancy? It's old John Broadby's daughter that I'm thinking of—my cousin—my wife, you understand —and the two girls. I want to tell John Quickberry what to say to 'em, for I hear they've been more than once outside the gate with him. They'll be poorly left, of course—but that's nothing, nothing whatever—no, sir, I've no time to speak of money; it's *private* with John Quickberry, I say! Whatever I may say to *him*, he'll keep private. At least till morning."

In a body, or one by one, to the very warders, they were thus dismissed from audience; except the anxious Methodist alone. Fast sinking as old Ffloyd was, all the more living intensity looked out like a waking soul from his black Welsh eye—almost Spanish when so set in ashy features: their dull, bloated outline was all gone; gaunt and large came out the bony mould of a former regularity, which had been handsome in his youth. The square, massive frame thrust up with spasms of pain, the very accents of his vehement but better-chosen language, all testified to something bolder, greater, and prouder, though perhaps yet more wicked, which Matthew Ffloyd might once have had the chance to become,—if he had not really been it in time past. By the very townsmen who knew his own humble Welsh origin, and his blood-relationship to plain old Broadby, whose daughter he had married—this ground of compassion was none the less deeply felt from being joined so closely with the awful grandeurs of death.

A short period in the serious interview there was, during which the subdued voice of Mr. Quickberry took part with the unhappy man's harsh, failing tones; until the former became far the distincter, the more earnest and agitated. The cautious warders looked in: that obscure pastor was only urging the dying member of his congregation, with clasped hands, with undisguised tears, to believe some confident assurance which he solemnly enforced. It was his business, doubtless:

they let him go on with it unrestrained, for the old man had turned his face aside, and lay silent. Soon, in fact, the Methodist was praying—so loud at last, so eagerly and, as it seemed to them, so long, that it might have been thought he would not stop till morning. At the close of this, however, in answer to an admonitory tap from outside, he came to the unfastened door of the ward, inviting in whoever chose. Although Mr. Ffloyd seemed now too weak to speak, he allowed, yet it was his desire to watch by, until the last; after which, only, the truth must be broken to the distressed family. Book in hand, accordingly, he still searched for a hymn, and would have sung it. "It was," he whisperingly assured them, "'*Happy Day*' —a precious and favourite strain both at class-meeting or chapel; which he had already been quoting, much to his afflicted hearer's apparent emotion, and in which he trusted that they (the turnkeys) would not object to join?" Quickberry at the same time hastily signified his assurance to them, with marks of recent horror and consternation, that in regard to the claims of other persons, or of temporal justice—nay, even if conviction of sin and guilty remorse were in view,—Mr. Ffloyd had almost of his own accord disclosed enough to humble all human self-confidence. The darkest conjectures had, indeed, been far exceeded by the dreadful truth; parts whereof he doubted that he could ever be justified in revealing. "But oh! my friends!" added the fervent, though often-scorned preacher, turning in again with accents that rose

as he would have proceeded, "have we not that one precious, precious instance of the dyin' thief—would that we could add here, if I might venture for to pint you unto it, the case of the blessed gaolier and prisoners at Philippy, who——"

He was cut short by one of the excluded inmates of the ward, who had sulkily passed in to his own squalid pallet. "Ho! Ye may save yer low Methody ranting, I say, master," said he, rudely, "aye, or chanting either, don't ye *see?* What's left of us *now*, I fancy we're all churchmen here!"

He pointed to the now-favoured bed, round the heaped head of which the upper turnkey peered. "'Od rabbit it—yes, Simon!" put in the latter, with a coarse technical concern; "he's *gone.* The doctor's just been an' laid down a bit, yonder—run and wake him. Hark ye, too, look up the porter's old girl—he's near stone-cold, man! I fancy, mister, ye might have cut it short half-an-hour ago? Leastways, no use for any more." Yet the dead man, ere breathing his last, had so writhed back toward the Methodist's unsolicited devotions, had even so slipped forward in the direction of the voice,—while the stony eyes stared up, the opened mouth seemed about to have spoken, and the contorted arms to be still slowly curving the hands inward together,—that Quickberry gazed in silent awe to the last moment allowed him, nor ever forgot the impressive circumstance.

Inscrutable hieroglyphics! Haste will be made to shut in the stare, to bind up the gaping space, to straighten out the convulsive posture—and since

then, O Quickberry, generations have dropped their dust above thy own remains, without helping out the deep uncertainty thou hadst then. It may be, that even thy sincere and true spirit, which must have passed beyond the stars, has not yet ascended to the solution of mysteries like this, reserved for the final Day of all things. To us below, at least, as we find it recorded in the obsolete sources of the narrative, there is here, so to speak, nothing but the fossil impress of a motion, transient and unaccountable, on the shore of a stream of life which has itself passed away into stony strata. Nevertheless, reflected on by the light of the man's undoubted antecedents, it appears worthy of earnest note. Judging by his self-admitted deeds, both in earlier and later life, he well deserved to have been buried under the gaol pavement, in the felon's grave which he would infallibly have filled if he had recovered from his wound; he was, in fact, saved by a mere chance from the coroner's verdict of *felo-de-se*, which would have sent his body to the nearest cross-roads, with a stake through it, and no more ceremony than a dog receives. As it happened, less at the instance of John Quickberry than of the unreasoning widow's perseverance, not only did his bones moulder in consecrated ground, having had the service of the Church read over him (which Wesleyans have never rejected, nor did the civil law or ecclesiastical canon allow of choice in those days)—but the place was also surrounded by a plain iron railing,

and marked by a simple headstone, partly visible to the present hour. Over the name of Susan Ffloyd, his spouse, subsequently added to tell that she lies there too, can still be traced the brief inscription—"*Matthew Ffloyd, born* 1725, *died May* 30, 1780"—under this, between the two names, the mere reference to a Scripture text, which seems at any rate to have so far satisfied Mrs. Ffloyd, that she asked no supplement on her own part—"*St. Luke* xviii. 13." Turning to the passage thus indicated, we find only the prayer of the despised and humiliated publican in the Saviour's shortest parable—"*God be merciful to me a sinner.*" It is in a mean corner of the most neglected part of the great churchyard of St. Augustine's in Bristol, that these dumb lips thus try to pray, with the face in the dust, the hand upon the mouth. Inside a neighbouring aisle of the old Minster-church itself, is the orthodox family tablet of damp marble with a cenotaph, let in from the vault of her father, the eccentric old merchant, John Broadby; whose harsh merits are there recorded, along with the fact that Bristol owes more than one of its finest buildings to his munificent charitable bequest. Not far off are glorious monumental brasses of ancient bishops; the recumbent effigies of a knightly Crusader and his devout lady—he with crossed feet, both with folded hands raised, and calm faces,—catch the changing beams of colour from a great stained window opposite, sublime in apostolic forms and saintly adoration. That window turns but a

dull-red, wire-screened back to the rank grass where the Ffloyds lie, best forgotten. There are, to be sure, uncouth mocking shapes in the gurgoyles of the roof; or even within the chapels and the nave of the mighty Minster there are to be seen grotesque figures and visages of evil, most secular and half-goblin-like, which bring an ugly memory within the pale; as if but to show how the vast arches spring, and the lofty shafts are bound together, over innumerable mysteries such as this. Near the sugar-baker's house, on the other hand, that vulgar little conventicle-meeting-house in Bread-alley, of which he had been the principal supporter, (though with the sordid hand of a reputed miser, and without the regular attendance or consistent walk of a true Wesleyan,) has long disappeared; the local preachers succeed each other, according to their triennial terms, at a better station of the same pastorate, less associated with scandalous disclosures. Out of a period when even the pure and pious Cowper sang praises from a despairing heart, sanctifying all life out of a soul self-reprobated (too clearly-conscious of unpardonable wrongs, surely, for the ordinary explanation of his madness?)—from that strange epoch it is impossible to draw so much as a single clear inference here. Forgery, hypocrisy, hardened indifference to the last toward religious ordinances, desperate resolution to die, even to bear, if possible, the punishment beyond—yea, lawless piracy and robbery and slaughter—these were nothing to the deeper atrocities, with their appalling consequences

disclosed, which now burdened the only living depositary of Ffloyd's hideous secrets.

Mr. Quickberry hastened out in a frame of mind scarce equal to the task before him; which, at the very early hour of dawn, happily for his power to break news of calamity or to console distress, he was justified in deferring a little while. Blessed at home with a worthy helpmate, he was strengthened to fulfil it duly. One immediate result of his late offices was, the complete vindication of Joseph Thomson's innocence, whether directly or otherwise; while the Bank and Mr. Spencer united in the ensuing wish, to compensate for all loss he had incurred, as well as to publish the amends to his character. Young Thomson, indeed, whenever thus at liberty, only withdrew his bail, and, being at bottom a young man of some pride, with a person suited, as has been said previously, to draw the eye of the recruiting-sergeant—at once accepted a bounty from one of those gay non-commissioned officers, who represented a dragoon-regiment at the actual seat of war. It should be remarked by the way that the said gallant corps, which he entered in this spirited manner, was no other than Ligonier's Light Horse, in which Cornet Cobham's promotion to lieutenant's rank was just gazetted, along with the mention of his being wounded in the last affair near Charleston. The sergeant called general attention to this at the time, aware of the Cornet's former prominence in Bristol; in the same breath pointing out that the

wound was specified as slight, and that the siege of the rebel town in question had merely been raised for the season, on account of French tricks, joined to the great heat of summer in those parts.

Meanwhile, the inquest upon the body of Mr. Ffloyd was adjourned for the day; owing to the mulatto's flight as well as to the Methodist preacher's obvious caution in evidence. Renewed excitement was indeed produced by news of the late bold attempt at abduction; in the case, particularly, of a young lady so conspicuous as Mr. Spencer's youngest daughter, who, by her maternal grandmother's favour, might rank among county heiresses. By her very serious illness in consequence, indignation against the Count was raised to the pitch of injustice. True, his valet had assisted in the daring act; yet even if then aware of the previous crime, Etherege had in his own designs sufficient ground for availing himself of the most desperate means, and for leaving Bristol as he had done. He certainly had not continued to profit by the man's service; or to countenance his escape, whatever opportunity he might have allowed for it. On the authority of Sir Richard Herbert, his near relation, [amidst extreme anxiety on Miss Spencer's behalf, which could bear but one interpretation during Sir Richard's prolonged stay in town, calling as he did at Beech Grove night and morning]—it was plain that personal fear had had no part in the course taken by the gentleman; his servant had been in some respects far from

acting in concert with himself; there was no other motive for his flight, so much as conceivable by Sir Richard, than the disgrace; which, in the Post-Captain's estimation, was abundantly adequate. The sheriff's diligent tipstaves, inspired by the suggestions of a less bucolic Bow-street runner from London, who happened to be down in this slow neighbourhood, then proceeded to search for the murderer at hand; in quarters not so unlikely as before, for a fellow with his leg broken.

The small dwelling of Mr. John Quickberry stood, as has been mentioned previously, in a back-court off the little alley-approached meeting-house. Here, the evening after his terrible duties had been discharged, his plain-featured though tender wife sat in-doors; rocking a cradle, while the kettle sang, and their only little maid prepared the frugal meal. The preacher himself, after such a hard day of it, had indulged himself in a tranquillising stroll with the two other children, toward the Temple Meads and the banks of the river; a rare luxury with him, and which proved unwontedly long. At the door, meantime, a modest knock came, a mild voice was heard. The maid answering, a very agreeable gentleman appeared; who, asking for the Reverend Mr. Quickberry, and being told of his absence, nevertheless was contented, nay pleased, to make the acquaintance of his simple partner. He did not state his name, but sat down conversing gently; earnestly avoiding to interrupt or disturb her in her maternal cares; which to him seemed no less plea-

sant than commendable and duteous. He had come to speak, he said, of the late lamentable occurrence, in which he took the interest not merely of a philanthropist but of a Christian. He would wait, however long, for Mr. Quickberry's return; pending which, he drew from Mrs. Quickberry, if not all she knew,—which was only enough to enable her to soothe her husband—yet all that she or he considered prudent towards strangers; perhaps a little more. Mrs. Quickberry affirmed to her visitor, that although herself by nature of a curious disposition, yet we were bound to wrestle against the sin of our first parents which we inherited—and moreover, that this was still more befitting the helpmeet of a pastor, a local pastor especially, who might possibly become acquainted with things she had better not seek to know. They were going away very soon, she said, as the three stated years were nearly out; so that she endeavoured to avoid entanglements.

The gracious stranger's leisure, though not his courtesy or patience, had worn out for the present; he doubted whether it would be in his power to call again, and would have gone without considering it worth while to leave his name at the end, but for her habitual thoughtfulness in such cases. The unpretending name of Mr. Smith did not in the least enlighten her husband, at his return before class-meeting time: nor, although the gentleman had inquired finally in what direction Mr. Quickberry had gone, had they met on the

way; owing perhaps to a pastoral visit made by the latter, which had detained him. Mr. Smith's figure had somewhat of the retired military air, erect, much exceeding middle height; stout, yet well squared above; his dress grave, though with ruffles and cravat of the worldly fashion; his head powdered, indeed, but on the top quite bald: his full and open countenance, however, that of one who little prized such vanities, though scarce past the age when they are too often only changed for worse folly. He had some time been in distant foreign parts, among the heathen; where Mrs. Quickberry was disposed to infer that he had been seriously impressed, at least, by scenes he had witnessed. They little imagined as yet, that he was Mr. Osborne Smith, the late Sir Ralph Herbert's chaplain and confessor, less commonly designated Father Joseph; originally, in truth, a young man of the world, a military layman and a Protestant —understood to be an illegitimate scion of a very illustrious house; whose interest could have secured him the highest prospects in the army, had he not sacrificed all to conviction, to enthusiastic missions abroad, to devout zeal at home, to the lofty cause (as was shrewdly suspected, nor ever denied) of the sacred Order of St. Ignatius.

On the following day the mulatto was found at the dock-lane tavern, still under a surgeon's care. A very restless and refractory patient, he had not profited as he might have done by medical atten-

dance. His fractured ankle could no longer be saved; it was even doubtful whether amputation would not be too late to save his life; which, by removal, would certainly have been cut very short. Adolphe, however, so far from repudiating the charge on which he was arrested, was ready to save the coroner all further trouble or delay, by his own spontaneous declaration in writing. This, therefore, was formally received. He could write with fluency in his own native language, though in a boyish hand and almost childish idiom. In the Spanish tongue, accordingly, by the help of an interpreter from the neighbouring docks, the few following questions and answers were set down and attested; along with the brief declaration interposed.

Q. "*You were lately servant of Señor Etherege, commonly entitled the Count de St. Amand?*"

A. "*I am the slave of his Excellency the Count de St. Amand.*"

Q. "*What is your name? Where were you born? What is your age?*"

A. "*Adolpho Manizil. In the island of Cuba. Thirty-nine years or more.*"

Q. "*As it appears you are desirous to put in a statement in evidence, we, the deputy-coroner and coroner's-clerk for the county of Gloucester are appointed to receive it by commission, in presence of a notary public who will attest the same, hereby legally cautioning you that you are not required to criminate yourself, and ask you if you say that you know anything of the cause of the death of Matthew Ffloyd,*

late sugar-baker, Bread-street, Bristol, which took place in the common gaol of Bristol on the night of the 30th May, ultimo?"

A. *"I inform you, Señors, that I stabbed the so-named gentleman."*

Q. *"Did any other person aid or abet you to the same? Or was any other person art and part with you in the deed, whether before or after it took place? —As you do not appear to understand this question, you are allowed to add here what you appear to intend in explanation."*

A. *"I had been sent to the prison several times, with written messages to the gentleman. I only knew his English name. The Count, my master, sent me in answer to the gentleman's requests for assistance, being imprisoned. Sometimes the messages were open to me, sometimes not; but I never read his Excellency's writing unless he desired me. Besides, they were in English, which I understand little. On the evening of the Count's departure, in his absence, I was preparing his Excellency's trunks. My eye fell by chance upon a message which the Count had partly written, but had not sent. I here discovered that it had been hidden from me who the prisoner was. It thus appeared that his real name was Coguel. Coguel was a man I believed dead, a Portuguese traitor, a renegade, a monster. When a lad, I was shut in by him beneath the cabin of a Spanish guarda costa, which was blown up shortly after, destroying all on board except me, who was saved, I having by chance a rosary round my neck, with a crucifix belonging to*

Juana Sanchez, a woman then on shore. Coguel was always supposed to have done this. I knew well that Coguel was a monster, because one night, about a year before, he came down in the dark and cut out my tongue, and said it was for blabbing. He was then lieutenant of the guarda costa.

"I ran straight to the prison, before the Count my master had returned. It was then I gained admittance to the prisoner, and stabbed him. I had often seen him before, but at a distance, or when he must have disguised himself from me. It was half dark. He struggled and looked at me hard, and there was a mark on one of his wrists which I knew well. I could always have recognised him by that. I could have known him without it, at least by his voice when he guessed who I was. It was then I fled.

"It was a mistake, Señors. But this is no cause in my favour. I ought not to have looked at the writing of the Count my master, without orders. It is true, I could not well have avoided it, for it lay in my way. The Count never told me it was Coguel, but I think he would have done so afterwards. For, when soon accusing me of the crime, his Excellency spoke as if he had already told me by chance. It would have been difficult, however, for him to refuse my services at that moment, as there was a rich and beautiful young lady about to elope with my master, because her friends opposed their marriage. His Excellency passionately loved her, and, being defeated, was resolved to fly. He could not prevent me from following, but I could go no farther.

"*As to Coguel, the truth is, it is now a mistake on my master's part only. Coguel must have been dead about twenty-five years or more. He being also on board* El Serpiente *at the moment of her being blown up, he could not really have been the one that slipped away. The two could never have escaped alive together, they were such enemies. When my master asked me why I fled, I only gave him to understand that it was not Coguel, but he was too enraged to believe this. When I now reflect, however, I ought but to have stabbed the real man deeper, as soon as I knew him.*

"*And I make the holy sign of the cross here, to swear on it that this is a true declaration.*

(Signed) "ADOLPHO MANIZIL."

Q. "*Do you not intend to state to us, for the coroner's information, the exact facts of your mistake as to the murder? That is to say, will you not mention, then, who you found the said so-called Matthew Ffloyd, now deceased, to be in reality? This may be of much importance to the coroner.*"

A. "*Señors, no. It makes no difference. No, Señors, I decline.*"

On the subsequent proposal by the authorities, that a surgical operation should now take place to preserve his life, Adolphe Manizil objected, not unreasonably; though in the most stubborn manner. He here claimed the right of a free denizen of Britain, as recently put forward to him, and obstinately preferred to do without amputation. The effect was, that gangrene rapidly set in; his pain,

which had increased by fits, at length wholly ceasing, it became evident that mortification had ensued. It was then not worth while to remove him from the tavern. He was no sooner informed that his intractable conduct had left him but a few hours of life, than the only marks of discomfort on his stolid and swarthy features were caused; but simply by the strong desire to have a priest brought him. These were not the days to suit that wish, indeed; news of Lord George Gordon's riots in London were just arriving, and the easily-roused mob of Bristol was eager to imitate the loyal movement. But Adolphe's mute appeals were not destined to be lost; his case had attracted notice, and more than one steadfast and qualified representative of the ancient faith was at hand. Mr. Osborne Smith now demonstrated that courage which had supported him among the bonzes and mandarins of China; he openly came forward, attending to receive the confession of the friendless mulatto, as well as to administer the last solemn rites. Adolphe had real burdens on his conscience too; though in the present instance he was but the innocent victim of fidelity and sacred duty. Relieved from the former, he died tranquil.

The Methodist preacher's evidence at the inquest had proved little more than a confirmation of Adolphe's statement; a verdict of wilful murder against the latter was the sole result. But Mr. Quickberry, in the afternoon, was again favoured by a visit from Father Joseph, as chaplain of the

late Sir Ralph; accompanied by the family solicitor. Backed thus by interests of a civil nature, their earnest request could not be gainsayed. Mr. Quickberry at last acceded to it, in so far as he thought right: nay, without any undue degree of inflation from the fact that a Jesuit priest had needed his help, rather rejoiced that there was no seal over confession among the Wesleyans; and, that night, reposed all the more peacefully by Mrs. Quickberry's side.

CHAPTER XIII.

FATHER JOSEPH, OF KINGSWOOD AND NORHAM, VISITS THE ABBÉ HORNE AT HERBERT COURT.

CAPTAIN HERBERT'S scarce-finished letter of explanation to the Abbé, written on board the frigate abroad, and chiefly relating to matters of religious belief, had never been sent. His serious accident and illness had, of course, prevented this; and, from the same causes, he had returned home almost as soon as a letter could have reached Herbert Court. Painfully though he had looked forward to the unavoidable necessity of substituting for it a directoral admission, and of justifying his course by what must resemble controversial argument,—when the result to his worldly fortune could hide no longer; nevertheless, he found, as is so often found in experience, that earlier candour might have saved them both much uneasiness, if not error. Secret anticipation, naturally, had deepened the colours of their actual embarrass-

ment on the occasion. Into the details of the interview at which they mutually came to an understanding on the point, it were as unbecoming as needless to enter. The narrator is warned by that hand of boyish admiration, of youthful affection, and of never-broken friendship towards Sir Richard Herbert, with respect for the character of Theodore Horne, which Rear-Admiral Sir Harry Spencer still extends over the mass of papers he left; the same hand which alone sanctioned this imperfect and ill-proportioned record. His authority, doubtless heightened by claims of connexion all but filial, is here deepened by a well-grounded esteem in no way inferior to that which a son might have ventured to avow.

Suffice it to repeat, that the excellent chaplain and librarian at Herbert Court was in the habit of receiving occasional notes from the confessor of the late Sir Ralph at Kingswood, whether involving the duty of reply or otherwise. These communications had of late become more frequent; and coming as they did from a superior of the Order, a member of the Sacred Society—so conspicuous to its brethren as he,—they had already impressed the Abbé with misgivings as to the estates in question; whose effect, though not their nature, he had occasionally betrayed to his few acquaintances. The influence of Father Joseph, his singular intellectual acuteness, the weight of his opinion at head-quarters in Italy, were not more undoubted than the prominent part he took at home at that critical period,

for the interests of English Catholics; or than the unconquerable zeal for this great cause, which he had brought to bear on events. It is now even doubtful whether Lord George Gordon himself was not a tool in hands so able; though perhaps he or his agents went too far in this.

The Abbé himself had his over-timid delicacies, his sensitive difficulties, and his deficiency in straightforward candour. He *too* had doubted whether his former pupil could with propriety join in the solemn rites of the Church, or with decency profess—if accepting his uncle's whole property under these terms—that he had sincerely returned to the faith, or had secretly cherished it while holding the royal commission at sea. He had been in fact partly forewarned as to Captain Herbert's actual course, by the opposite conviction of others, who took it for granted; while at the same time there had been something to horrify him in the consequent steps taken by the lawyers of Mr. Etherege, as next of kin—representing his widowed mother the Abbess at St. Maloes. He himself, indeed, had met Etienne Etherege more than once, and shared in the general fascination impressed by the person, manner, and disposition of that distinguished young man; but, from the earlier repute of the Count, nay, from the slight intercourse they had had together, the Abbé was too well acquainted with the old tone of Versailles and that of modern Continental or English wit, to judge so charitably as he could have wished, of his real sentiments on religion. His recent movement, though greatly

attributable, no doubt, to technical suggestion from lawyers, had sometimes made the old priest shudder inwardly: nor was this feeling much qualified by the unaccountable conduct of Father Joseph in countenancing or supporting such a claim.

Sir Richard's narrow escape abroad, the appearance of his maimed figure, and his sudden safe return, had thus not been allowed to break too abruptly on the old man. By a hurried note from Lord Beaufoy's country-seat, he had been sufficiently prepared for the result; and that without still leaving room for any ambiguity, as far as Herbert Court was concerned. Herbert did not give up the naval service: at Lord Beaufoy's, in fact, there were professional plans being concerted, and influences of a political kind being arranged, which opened up new prospects to him, with the help of his friend, Sir Charles Douglas, for serving his king and country efficiently at that time of need. It was likely that he might very speedily return with Sir Charles to the West India station, to wait for Admiral Rodney from Gibraltar, which place the fleet had gone to relieve; at all events he was almost certain to follow in the fresh squadron of line-of-battle-ships preparing, probably in command of one of their number.

At the actual meeting, no little pleasure mingled with the remaining sense of awkwardness. The latter difficulty was no longer trifled with, but at once broken through and despatched; partly, by the honest professional frankness of one fresh from action, yet scarcely less from the deepened serious-

ness of a recluse who had seen cause to weigh again his own grounds of belief. There are at home, sometimes, inward dangers, contests, tempests, even calms, quite as arduous or wearying as those abroad in the world. Such, the good Abbé had not merely undergone, but he now anxiously revealed them to the naval captain; moving him near to tears, it is true, but not enabling him to rise so high in faith as the priest could, upon these ladders of vision, where alone the latter beheld angels ascending and descending. Sir Richard, it has been stated before, was somewhat of a mediocre man; he had little either of intellectual grasp or of imaginative liveliness. Harry, and others such as Jackson of the foretop, alone saw a heroic element in his character—helped by a commanding figure; it was but the rarer professional theorist, like Sir Charles Douglas, who could value to the full his long and varied experience as a practical seaman; and perhaps, moreover, the wayward fancy of a girl, ripening with accident, might cherish a warmer feeling towards him—favoured by mere chance. Yet if the Abbé Horne broke down somewhat from the proper dignity before him, rather treating Herbert as if *he* were the confessor; still there was soon more than amends made, in the same way. Sir Richard could not see, indeed, why matters in this respect must alter, merely because their creeds must differ on some points during life: they were soon to separate again; he would still write to his revered friend and father, still pour before the ready eye

his thoughts from his quiet cabin, still seek and prize his counsels, not on scientific points merely, but on those of conscience and religion. All this was before Sir Richard went on again to Bristol, with two brother officers, his guests for the night; so that he had to sit up late with the Abbé to talk, and still they had not time enough. They even talked a little, however, of naval matters; of the true plan of the war and its tactics—whether the "weather-gage" was really the best, whether the line of battle could ever thus be decisively broken; of Admiral Byron's action, and the doomed *Buffalo's* startling freak, after it. Of this incident, the captain said, Sir Charles Douglas still continued to speak ever and anon, as if the seed of some new notion were growing in his mind from it. At the same time, they spoke of the expectations excited in scientific quarters by the rumoured Scotch book, by a Mr. John Clerk of Eldin; the first edition being then just published,—though, as it proved, not containing the least hint to the great point, which it afterwards illustrated so clearly.

Thus, the Abbé being led away for a moment on his hobby, seemed to forget his great trouble. Notwithstanding which, in the morning, when they parted for the day, he did not look as if he had slept. He said nothing, being in company, but there was the pain of some growing resolution in his features, which he doubtless reserved for the next private occasion. Then, Sir Richard did not return as expected, indeed stayed a whole week in Bristol; owing, as he mentioned by letter, to causes he

would explain afterwards, connected with a most disgraceful affair on the part of a gentleman to be then named.

With his return, new thoughts effaced the old chaplain's decision from his looks, though not from his mind. What Herbert had to tell him was, indeed, extraordinary; as yet, not half the issue of it all was apparent, nor could the event have anything to do with the Abbé's individual plans; but there was satisfaction blended with the dismay of what he learned. Moreover, Sir Richard was one while busy with professional matters; another with those of his own neglected property,—for Sir Ralph's will at least secured him the means to clear off some of its burdens, and set some repairs and improvements a-going. Added to which,—as regarded opportunities for private conversation,—was the natural circumstance of Sir Richard's riding frequently as far as Bristol; where he was likelier to stay the night, than not. Instead of thus disclosing his mental purpose, therefore—probably, lest it might be changed—the Abbé at last wrote to Father Joseph a letter, in which he declared it; spontaneously stating also such additional reasons, drawn from Sir Richard Herbert's affairs, as, without unnecessary meddling, the case justified.

"I have erred, Father Joseph," wrote he, some weeks subsequent to the main occurrences last related: so reads the copy retained by him, of a communication neither official in any way, nor written in any cipher of the order. "Even as a

secular priest, I have erred all along. I now wish to leave this station: and have accordingly to inquire whether it is not possible that I might be moved to some post demanding activity, with some little dialectical acumen,—or I may venture to offer some diplomatic practice and acquaintance with courts, such as that of Versailles, or even of the German or Italian states? The truth is, whether Sir Richard returns at once to sea, or is appointed to one of the new ships in preparation, his early marriage is certain. This event cannot, of course, take place until the close of the war; but Sir George Rodney having so successfully relieved Gibraltar, and last reported on his way to the West Indies, the contest must soon be decided. Few who know that Admiral can doubt the result. I shall be useless here during Sir Richard's absence; still more superfluous, as you must be already aware, after his domestic settlement. Another autumn and spring would find me painfully situated. I may state that the lady, Miss Spencer,—although young, and, indeed, agreeably known in every way to myself,—belongs to one of the most rigid Protestant families; while her own character, it is not difficult to see, is such as only to confirm the change (ever to be deplored by *me*, at least,) in my favourite pupil."

No answer to the letter seemed intended by Father Joseph. The more abrupt, therefore, appeared a personal visit made by him, to the old Somersetshire house. Visits there were rare from him: there was something uncomfortable in them,

to the Abbé Horne; not because the latter stood in awe of him, but because of a certain vague incompatibility. The feeling seemed to be undefinably mutual, or, if there were any difference, it was that Father Joseph had a slight dread of the Abbé's expedients and plans, if not of the Abbé himself.

"My dear Abbé Horne," said the latter, hastening with him into the library, and speaking as if he had just read the communication, "allow me to say that you are too modest. You are wrong, I think. I was absent when your note arrived, and I have posted to this place. This place, permit me to suggest, is a most important one."

"Possibly so," was the answer, in a tone rather too settled for a subordinate. "Still, individually speaking, I have no hope of it whatever. I cannot but feel, Father Joseph, that the rule of the Society which prescribes change of station is a good one; for many reasons which I need not suggest to *you*."

"Dear Abbé," persisted Mr. Osborne Smith, with the gentlemanly and secular air he preferred, "I did not speak as your provincial. No. Had I done so"—he took out a letter in the cipher known only to members of his superior grade, and glanced at it—"I might have proceeded on the special mention of you, here made, and that with the sanction of the General himself. 'The Abbé Theodore,' writes our revered head, 'has been sneered at as one of the obsoletes—on the contrary, he is one of those rare intellects to which the age will yet come round again!' We already

observe distant signs of this in England," added the Chaplain of Kingswood. "Let me request you to lay aside this impulse—one of those risings of the flesh and its self-will, which it is incumbent on every member to trample under foot."

"The edges of *every* faculty rust in this motionless state," argued the Abbé, most undutifully. "Which state the rules forbid, as I remarked." He glanced round at his laboratory, his models, and tools; perversely bent, no doubt, on a great effort: yet the other confessor could not but have noticed these worldly trifles before. "As to my former pupil—as to his future wife—I have no hope of their being shaken from their schismatic position. True, their desire is, that I should remain—it is taken for granted by them. Is there no dangerous latitudinarianism to *either* side—to *both*—in our so associating together?"

The younger Jesuit raised his strong eyebrows at the question, but smiled as he answered. "So far as Father Theodore is concerned, at all events, —that *does* seem a point of casuistry too nice!"

"I do not know that," said the elder priest, looking down abstractedly; the long, thin, nervous fingers of one delicate hand being clasped about his chin, which was worn, bony, and tremulous with growing years. "I am not quite sure even of that. It is impossible to avoid indirect discussions between those domesticated so closely. The contact with practical life becomes vastly multiplied—indeed in a ratio which might be called geometrical—with an establishment such as Sir

Richard must set up, when he resides. We are none of us self-contained systems of doctrine—we each stand for a whole series of arguments and authorities. The inferior dialectician may, indeed, recede for the time, and be silenced,—but have you never felt *this*, Father Joseph?—you, above most minds, *must* have felt it"—he looked suddenly up—"I mean the singular manner in which, at some slight reasoning from a duller and simpler intellect, after having triumphantly put it down and pursued our demonstration, mark me—we yet remain vaguely annoyed! It is, so to speak, as if some infectious particle—some mere flying seed or random shaft had been lodged by chance, we know not where, in the fabric of our convictions—perhaps the mortal germ of dissolution, unless——"

"Yes—true—most true," responded his companion, hastily. "Innumerable are the disguises of the evil one. *Retro Sathanas!*" and he crossed himself in due form. "But all this is unnecessary, Father Theodore," he added, as the Abbé drew his chair nearer, apparently desirous to proceed. "Externally, I need not point you to Bellarmine, a Cardinal indeed on the refutation of heresy. For all inner scruples, too subtle for the usual secular priesthood or the mechanical orders, can we have anything better than Ribadeneira's excellent life of our sainted founder, not to speak of the Constitutions and Exercises!"

"I thought, in the circumstances, considering the profounder experience which *you*"—but the Abbé stopped, with a little flush on his faded

cheek; for it might not have been pleasant to Mr. Smith, to have allusions made to his original alteration of creed. So far from this appearing, however, the chaplain of Kingswood did not seem to understand the precise danger: (a danger, be it remarked, which never proved fatal to the orthodoxy of the Abbé Horne, for he afterwards met it resolutely by deeper study of St. Augustine, of St. Thomas à-Kempis, and of Bossuet, throughout his closing years). The reverend visitor referred with perfect calmness to his own former continuance under heresy: to him, heresy itself of every kind was one of the many evil means used to a good end by the Supreme Disposer; thus alone was it justified. A sincerer member of his renowned order, probably, never breathed; a more thorough-going and consistent one, certainly not; he was accordingly fast rising in the grades of that zealous organisation, of which he ultimately became General—and lived to look on the effects of the great French Revolution with well-earned pleasure, even as with the steadiest faith he previously beheld its bloody scenes, and encountered risks from them too. He now entered into particulars of the Order's prospects, which have not been recorded so as to reach the secular eye; they chiefly related to the late fanatical riots, to the reactionary impression so happily produced by excesses so brutal, and to the steps desirable for the improvement of the opportunity; as well as to anticipations of the close of the war, when the ill-advised Louis Seize might have to regret the return of a too-liberal army from the

scene of his alliance with revolutionary heretics. Father Joseph was thus so loyal in his views at the time, as to deserve honourable mention.

"You! dear father! hitherto a useless member here!" loudly echoed he, with lifted and deprecating hands; when the Abbé had made but a faint return to his encouraging assurances. "I can only account for this mistaken supposition from the fact, that you naturally retain much of the secular priesthood, along with the larger ideas *we* cherish. How far from your *acting* wrongly, however! The efficiency of the navy of this country, as I have already pointed out, is just now a vital object; the quicker that French affairs are brought to a head —by the throwing back of their army among the people—by defeat to their fleets,—all the better! Sir Richard Herbert, it seems, is a most able officer?"

"As a practical seaman, I believe," was the eager reply, "not excelled. In the theoretic qualifications, hitherto far too little considered, I have done my poor part to aid his studies; though science without experiment on the spot is difficult to apply correctly. Better than all, perhaps, there is some most decisive new stroke in tactics—precisely intelligible to naval men alone,—which Admiral Rodney has in view, and to the thorough success of which it is essential to have such commanders present. Not only so, but I believe Sir Richard is one of the very few who have yet happened to see the necessity of——"

"This is excellent, my dear Abbé," said the other;

glancing round with some alarm at the naval models, by which he might have been called on to verify such information. "Excellent. I had the pleasure of seeing Sir Richard lately in Bristol, when I decidedly approved his course in the matter. His professional prospects are of the highest character; he has acted, I think, not merely as he *must* have done, but as his best interests pointed. At the same time, even had you actually intended to bring about this result, it could not have worked better for the sacred cause!"

"This young Irish lady, then—this third or fourth cousin who proves next of kin?" asked the Abbé; sufficiently tranquillised to take out his old-fashioned agate snuff-box, bound with chased gold in the manner of the *ancien régime*. "In Ireland, happily, there is neither heresy nor atheism; Miss Fitz Gerald can, I am glad to think, receive the holy symbol without either insincerity, or that horrible—yes, that blasphemous profanation which, I fear, was lately imminent!" A closer view of his antique box was here solicited by the Kingswood father, who examined the relic with interest. "But," continued the elder priest, "does Miss Fitz Gerald become a nun—or how?"

"On the contrary, she marries. No. *That* would have been injudicious." Mr. Osborne Smith for a moment startled old Mr. Horne by a sinister contortion of countenance; but it was merely in order to resist the unaccustomed effect of a pinch from the snuff-box, imprudently taken. "The

English law," he explained, after sneezing this off, "would now counteract such an obsolete expedient. We evade it by marrying her to a fellow-countryman of her own, approved by us under conditions —indeed, an individual of sufficiently limited desires, and obliged by various circumstances to reside in Sweden. A heretic country, and far from tolerant,—yet suiting him. *We*, of course, thus draw the bulk of the revenues."

Mr. Horne knew less of marriage or worldly matters in general than Mr. Smith did. The final relinquishment of Sir Ralph's great fortune cost him a sigh still, but it was a subdued one. He had only to ask further, whether anything more was known as to the infatuated young man—he did not name him—by whose sudden departure, as by the cessation of his legal and other measures in claim of the estates, he hoped there was some indication of recoiling, however tardily, from the impious attempt.

"You still allude, I presume," said Mr. Smith, with gravity, "to the ecclesiastical point. Really, Abbé,—under however ill-qualified a guide, it seems attributing too much to Voltairean superficialities, or even those of a worse nature, to doubt the possibility of this wretched outcast having been qualified, so far as that goes, piously to fulfil the terms of Sir Ralph's will! He *was*, I assure you, on a fair way to the most reverent faith; the sole question then being, whether he would still have suited *us*. We could not help ourselves, however,—as the *relationship* was, and indeed is still, undoubted. I solemnly

declare to you that I had no suspicion, not the most remote, of the all-important truth which altogether nullifies that fact!"

"Of what truth, then? You mean, as to the unhappy Etienne Etherege?"

"As to this miserable Etienne Herbert, I *do* mean," returned the other. "Or let us call him Etienne La Tour, or D'Hevricour,—as these were, both of them, names which his exiled maternal grandfather, Sir Ralph's youngest brother, lawfully chose to take in the French colonies."

Compared with the keen glances of the Abbé Horne, naturally penetrative, and trained to the *finesse* of the most intriguing of old European courts, the Most Reverend Joseph Osborne Smith's were usually weak and unexpressive. In a countenance otherwise so imposing, masculine, and Roman, this defect of the eye was a marked one; it had been charged, indeed,—though by an Episcopal bishop whose wishes he more than once frustrated,—with an ox-like dulness in which he could take refuge from all chances of exposure. When he evidently meant it but to be confidential—while yet indicative of involuntary curiosity as to the extent of a colleague's information on any point,—the inner mechanism of his outward vision might have been thought ill-adjusted, or else he managed it awkwardly.

"I do not understand you," said the Abbé, with dignity; shrinking, nevertheless, from the duller gaze. "I have certainly heard suspicions hinted

as to the career of his father. A Spanish noble, however impoverished or unjustly treated, serving in an obscure *guarda costa* on the Cuban coast—betrayed, treacherously murdered by some atrocious plot—but at the same time himself accused, apparently on good grounds, of having favoured smuggling or piracy, or what not. Still, as regards the young man's own rights—surely, his father's name, which was——"

"Don Victor d'Etterega de la Castra," readily prompted the chaplain of Kingswood, with legal coolness. "Let us grant it. By what patent this title was held, we do not now inquire; we need not now bring proof to show, as could be shown, that the vessel was a pirate, whether under cover of the Spanish Government service or not. What we now proceed upon is simply this—that at least the principal document, in evidence of Mademoiselle Herbert or D'Hevricour's marriage to this said Spanish captain, is neither more nor less than a *gross forgery*."

The elder priest grew paler as he heard. "His widowed mother—the venerated *supérieure* of the *Sacré Cœur* at St. Maloes, recollect! Impossible! Can you mean to infer——"

"It cannot be hidden, Father. The actual ship's journal, recovered by him through the aid of a now undoubted forger—and placed, unnecessarily, in lawyers' hands,—did not for the time excite any doubts. It had been taken, very naturally in the circumstances, for granted. Well executed as the questionable portion had been, and skilfully intro-

duced by one evidently familiar with such technicalities, it was, after all, however, written on paper containing the mark of a date which absolutely explodes the iniquitous trick!"

"He must himself have been deceived! His flight seems to imply that he was no party to this?" said the Abbé, feebly sitting down again.

"Heaven alone knows. Unless, indeed"—Father Joseph corrected himself, with the first symptom of bitterness he had evinced—"unless, among the many secrets which appear to have been reserved for the breast of an obscure person named Quick berry, *this* is, perhaps, included! I speak merely from what *he* condescended to make known to our solicitor and myself. As to the death-bed admissions of the poor dumb slave—whom I attended after his sacrifice to this wretched pretender's deeper crime,—I cannot, even to you, dear Abbé, break the solemn seal of the confessional. Nothing hinders me, however, from *acting* upon my knowledge, should the agents of the frantic young adventurer dare to contest it."

"Surely, surely, Father Joseph," argued his troubled hearer, "there was already enough to have deterred the sceptic—I fear, the Atheist—from persevering! Under the terms, at least, of such a will as Sir Ralph's, which—which—doubtless—you may have done well to suggest to the old baronet! Technical grounds, indeed, might perhaps now be urged on his part, to allow time for completer legal proofs? Who knows but that Mr. Etherege may have been led already nearer to the

faith? He has been bred in it, he possesses a fortune of his own, there must be influence on his part in France,—where a title is claimed through his mother's relations on that side! Still—still, at the best—in *any* case, I feel, he will never persist in fulfilling such conditions!"

"I think not," returned Mr. Smith, tranquilly—"I think *not*. Is it possible, Father, that you continue to suppose his flight due to such causes or hopes—even when combined with the trifle of a defeated abduction! This other individual, then, I see—this teacher of the Ranters, or Quaker schoolmaster, I scarce know precisely which—*he* has not yet wandered in the direction of Somersetshire?"

"I hear for the first time of such a person," said Mr. Horne, naïvely.

"Accidentally passing the lane where he lived," pursued Mr. Smith, with increased disdain, "I chanced to recollect a point of inquiry omitted before, and therefore called again at the man's cottage. I was shown in—to a closet where sat a figure similar to his, under a shelf containing about a dozen volumes, and engaged in what he styled 'preparation for Sabbath duties!' He was a total stranger, however. The other man himself, with his family, was gone—I do not recollect where, but to a distance. However, it is due to you, my dear Abbé, to say on this Quickberry's authority what I now do. The murdered prisoner, Ffloyd, in attributing the cause of his death, referred it to deeper grounds than those existing in the mind of the poor mulatto, Adolphe Manizil, whom I myself confessed and

absolved. It was to Adolphe's master, let me tell you, that the victim himself imputed the chief mistake which induced his murder."

"What—*what*—does your Reverence hint at?" implored the Abbé; alarmed rather by the other's significant finger, than by the monotonous accents and expressionless look which it eked out.

"The supposed motive on the part of Etienne Etherege—so still to call him—was stated to Quickberry by Ffloyd before his death. This Ffloyd, it appears, had obstinately allowed himself to be mistaken by the young man for a Portuguese called Coguel, always understood to have been the destroyer of Don Victor's vessel with its commander and crew. The unfortunate mulatto had a cruel injury of his own to revenge besides; but did not suspect it was this Coguel, till told so at the last. The Count, his master,—to take Adolphe's public declaration,—plainly told him so by *design*. But in reality it was *not* Coguel. Which fact, I have reason to think, the master must have well known."

"For Heaven's sake, Mr. Smith," the Abbé entreated, in agitation, "why dwell on such a nicety? In any view, if this were so, it was *murder!* Etienne Etherege was then the murderer, the real murderer—his motive matters but little! The *supposed* motive, you said?"

"Of that supposed motive," answered the other Jesuit, "the dying man had been all along aware—it was a filial one—conceivably pious, as the phrase goes. It was a desire for vengeance against the said Coguel, as accessory to the death of Don Victor

d'Etterega, the young man's father. Up to the wretched old sugar-baker's last hour, too, it might seem that he adhered by his assertion as to the genuineness of those documents—so essential to young D'Hevricour's claim, and which he himself had professed to recover for the latter. Those documents, observe, were not as yet in question; we did not even connect their existence with that of this Ffloyd—this forger. It was only our subsequent examination that discovered the glaring flaw left in the fabric of his imposture: nay, the man Quickberry would fain have been mute regarding any eventual consciousness, on Ffloyd's part, of the real object for his murder in prison. *Enough*, however," added his Reverence, meaningly, "to prove his own sudden conviction on that point—he had at least declared, with his last breath, that his reputed wife in Bristol was the *true one*, and his daughters by her his *only* legitimate children. You can easily draw the inference, as touching any previous marriage—even though self-alleged—to a person who long survived, in however venerated a sancti——"

"All this still perplexes me, Father," broke in the anxious interjection. "His motive—the young man's real motive, you were about to say?——"

"—Was undoubtedly to ensure silence," said Mr. Osborne Smith, with unhesitating decision. "To stop finally the miserable culprit's mouth. The documents—if you will—were a secondary matter. There was a disclosure more overwhelm-

ing by far, certain to have come out at the Assizes. The precise fact seems to have been, that the supposed Coguel—apparently some West-Indian pirate, once engaged in some dark plot with private comrades against their captain—had in reality perished in it, and had been dead for above five-and-twenty years. The chief ruffian had himself anticipated their design, and seems to have actually alone escaped. This very miscreant in person, at all events, was no other than the Ffloyd of whose murder we speak. What his culpability in that long-previous crime—what his feelings in reference to it—what the degree of regard aroused in him toward the young man, his concern for his position, or his wishes on his behalf—all this is a problem of no bearing on the present case. True, in those realms of despair to which, obstinate and unshriven——"

"There is under all this some hideous—some appalling mystery to *me*," said the old Abbé, putting up his hand faintly. "Pray explain its drift more clearly, Father Joseph."

"Is it not quite clear," was the rejoinder, with a slight stare, "that Etienne Herbert, La Tour, or D'Hevricour, is thus hurled to the lowest depth of defeat and ignominy? His title of Count he may, no doubt, now obtain at the French court—but it is more than probable his illegitimacy draws with it the loss of his own fortune. And into *this* without delay we shall proceed to——"

"But *who*, I mean—who and what was this mur-

dered man—this so-called Ffloyd? In what possible way was Etienne Etherege mixed up with *his* crimes!"

"I think you must now at any rate understand their relationship, Abbé," said Father Joseph, in his most tediously passionless and uninflected manner. "There is, of course, an utter improbability in Ffloyd's final assertion to Quickberry, as to his ever having been entitled to the name of Don Victor D'Etterega. Matthew Ffloyd is the name he was always known by, it seems, in England—his reputed parents were Welsh, living at the small harbour-town of Cardiff, in Wales, where the legal register of the district corroborates these assertions. They are not doubted in Bristol, and whatever my own secret information as a priest, I must really leave it to this person, this Quickberry, to reconcile the——"

"I—I think I—am given to understand," broke in the Abbé, aghast and incoherent, "that it was his father, and that he fiendishly instigated—Good God! no—no—I see—he was under a mistake, and *accidentally* told the assassin that—it was in writing only! He had left it in the way by chance, I think you said, Father Joseph? I mean, he still supposed—true, true, there is an uncertainty *there!* For the sake of Heaven, not deliberate parricide! No. Corrupt though human nature is, *this* was impossible, happily. His reason had not *yet* given way."

"Yet of *what* enormity, Father Theodore," asked his Provincial, formally crossing himself and

looking upward, "is Reason itself not capable?—at least, in the infidel who deifies it! Besides, you forget," added he, with a sudden life-like energy (such as might have been felt a relief to ordinary hearers, after his unemphatic tones and accompanying monotonous motions of hand or head), "you forget how shamefully this vile father had *wronged him!*" He had almost started to his feet with the words; but took up his letter in cipher instead, and glanced at it with a mounted colour, opening a plain horn-rimmed eye-glass he wore.

"*Wronged* him?" the Abbé vaguely echoed, though for the moment only. Not mixing with the modern English world of the day, he did not know anything of the Protestant sneers at the Reverend Mr. Osborne Smith; which were base enough as accounting for his change of creed, or for his sacrifice of every worldly indulgence, real or apparent, to the conscious exercise of growing power. Neither, probably, had Mr. Smith himself ever been stung by hearing of the whispers in question; his acknowledged origin was most respectable; his former noble Protestant patron had rather seemed to be deserted by *him*, than otherwise; and the late Catholic baronet, his last client, had *always* taken an interest in his fortunes. But as regarded his very laconic remark, the Abbé Horne had lived too long not to follow the terrible gleam of light it cast—swift, lurid, cynically-suggestive—from gulf to gulf of the deplorable history. Pressing a hand upon his furrowed brow, he leant back shuddering,—as if to listen for the thunder.

Father Joseph had for the present dismissed the subject; except by another casual reference ere he went, to what appeared the most galling point: to wit, the growing counter-influence and effrontery of such persons as Quickberry—who had presumed to affect prudence on the matter, to have in some respect consulted his wife, and (though he had certainly asked no disclosures whatever in return) absolutely to pick and choose what he would tell "for lawful purposes!" Quickberry had appeared to ignore the fact altogether, that Matthew Ffloyd, whether as a pervert from the faith, as a heretic, or as a guilty mortal, had fallen to his unlicensed share by a mere casual stroke. Had the man lived to expiate his crimes in public, the chaplain of Kingswood did not hesitate to say that *he* would have been his favoured attendant at the last.

Passing to other things, he soon found his time exceeded. As the housekeeper, Mrs. Brinds, deferentially showed him out to his post-chaise, his Reverence expressed anxiety—but confidentially—as to the health of the good Abbé. While he looked round the sequestered neighbourhood from the great porch in front, he slightly shook his head; he stated his trust, however, that they might long profit by the continuance among them of so good a priest; whose active mind, at all events, was "well fitted to so important a scene!" And Mrs. Brinds curtseyed deeply; as he made the sign of blessing, and departed. She had a vague consciousness that Father Joseph, though so much younger, had the superior power; hence had she dreaded, that the

coming changes might rather lead to the Abbé's removal.

The Abbé Horne meditated alone behind. Jesuit as he was, the elder school of opinion had affected him all along; and the intellectual powers of his Provincial by no means overawed him. He could not bring himself to believe that the clue to the labyrinth of human error and frailty was in such hands; nay, to the cherished point of uncertainty in the charge against Etherege, he was fain to add the support of a stubborn belief on his own part, that when gross sacrilege had been virtually brought within the young man's reach, its very nearness had forced him to recoil.

No accustomed help of books, no long-practised recreation at the work-bench or the laboratory, can abstract the mind or guide it, from this weary beating to-and-fro on a lost track of sympathy. The very garden, sweet with full summer, failed him; it came back with the butterfly on the sunny wall, with the spider weaving from leaf to leaf, with the noiseless flaunting of the peacocks towards him on the balustrade of the terrace. The carpenters and masons were busy above, in the slight repairs going on at Herbert Court; he seemed to see it in their motions, to hear it in their airy voices. Yet it wears by little and little away; the blue firmament, up in its unfathomable heights, contains an awful satisfaction for such as he—who might have been sometimes inferred, by his expressions, to be feeling alarmed or reproved at his own attempts to be more merciful than the Highest.

CHAPTER XIV.

LECTORI DEBITUM MOLLIORI—SCENE THE LAST.

SIR RICHARD had not yet returned, when the day's post-bag was brought home. Correspondence now grew apace upon the old house, and among others that day was included more than one official letter; one largest, bulkiest, conspicuous with the Admiralty seal. The man that had brought the bag, a figure worth some remark at Herbert Court, stood outside the glass-door on the old back-terrace; indulgently fondling the great dog Neptune, who followed and courted him as long as he was there. Robert Jackson, late of the *Astræa's* foretop, was somewhat privileged with the Abbé Horne, whom he viewed with the deep respect entertained by his class for all chaplains; and he was less deterred from entrance by the imposing effect of the books and the carpet, than by this feeling. For already he had on several occasions assisted the old

clergyman in his experiments there, at the same time venturing to suggest a few improvements in the technical correctness or mechanical effect of models, when these in any way related to navigation. His frank blue eye now undisguisedly watched, out of a well-formed though almost mahogany-coloured face, for the strong probability of immediate news of an appointment for Sir Richard, with orders on active service; this prospect, of course, involving his own relief from a position somewhat awkward to a seaman. His looks brightened at the evident sign of a change at hand, when it was taken from the bag with special care by the young niece of the worthy old housekeeper, and laid with the rest before the Abbé; who, however, made no remark, nor showed any particular feeling at the time.

Jackson, therefore, merely waited for the return of Anne Brinds, with whom he moved away in perspective from the great oriel casement; evidently questioning her with much interest, but of course in vain. It distracted the Abbé's troubled thoughts, not unpleasantly, to follow their retreating forms with his reclusive eye; the spectacles still lowered over consolatory pages of an ancient Father. This athletic seaman's figure, as to present attire, might have been but an under-gardener's or that of a passing carpenter; for he turned his hand to anything required, and was, shortly after, to be seen going up and down the bricklayers' plank, with serviceable arm and easy

balance; or saving the plasterers trouble to get up their stage-ropes, with a head to which the sense of giddiness seemed unknown, and an apparent heedlessness of the centre of gravity or the laws of the earth's attraction. The old gardener considered him quick, also, in taking up the minor branches of horticulture; such as nailing up a high branch of a wall-tree, transferring potted flowers to their beds, or laying down and pegging the sprigs of the growing carnation, with a view to future bloom. Even Mrs. Brinds seemed coming to regard him as worth occasional consultation, on the difficulty of correcting a smoky chimney, of safely whitewashing a high ceiling, or obtaining the desirable stretch for a set of lengthened clothes-lines. He did not stay at the house, indeed, but in one of the few cottages of the long-neglected and diminished manor; where, after an absence of some days in search of a half-brother, a collier in the pits near Kingswood, he had returned with increasing signs of restlessness. It did not seem as if his general acceptance among the rural people were altering the case, in this respect: on the contrary, though there was a surprising politeness spread over Jackson's singular manners, his time manifestly hung heavy on his hands at the busiest, the very stir of hay-cutting did not altogether fill his thoughts, and the liveliest prognostications of heavy crops rather made him gloomy. Once of late, he had actually disappeared, [by good fortune for him, it was during Sir Richard's absence or

engrossment in other affairs;] and had returned in the same unaccountable mode, so jaded and travel-stained in aspect, nay, so penniless and even altered from his former dress, that the rumour had come to the Abbé's ears. On the latter's mildly questioning him whether he had been robbed, Jackson had at once freed the world at large from all blame in the matter; taking the fault wholly to himself, yet failing to explain in any intelligible way. He had not, he said, lost anything like all the money he had brought home—no—the bulk of it was safe enough: (the fact being, that the collier, his half-brother, had a large family, among whom the cautious Jackson had deposited his Plymouth hoards—as in the Bank of England's safe,—leaving what he thought sufficient pocket-money for himself). The Abbé, however, was thus driven to suspect that he gambled; the rustic folks began to accuse him, not of the miserliest disposition alone, but of curmudgeon-like unsociality, since he now neither took nor gave at the friendly tavern.

It had come out slowly at last, indeed—through Mrs. Brinds, who got it from her young niece, Anne—that Jackson drank nothing stronger now than water; simply because he dared not. He was only unsocial through too great a fondness for society, and wished on that ground to fly the harvest ale. True, he desired to lose no more time in returning to sea. The sea alone suited him — but whether or not, he was poor again; moreover, at sea the pay ran up, the prize-money gathered; a

man could keep sober there, he could even swear to drink water only, and stick to the vow, and come back with a full pocket in spite of all the Jews.

At the sight of Robert Jackson and Anne Brinds, these thoughts came up before the Abbé Horne; remaining behind them with an interest, partly enlivening, partly serious. For why all this, *through* Anne Brinds? Wherefore should that modest young woman arrive at truths, which were from others concealed? and what had she to do with Jewish history? The figure of the mariner, scarce yet at his manly prime, had from the first struck the good priest very vividly; standing outside there in the full light, his straw hat off, his loose white trousers (well-scrubbed since the questionable adventure) alone savouring of odd maritime life, Jackson might have stood for a hairy-throated Achilles in new bronze; only his long thick queue, tied with a fresh ribbon of sky-colour at the end, suggested incongruous ideas of cables, as he receded. His well-behaved demeanour as he stooped to hear Anne Brinds, was satisfactory enough; nevertheless there was a minute, or more, during which they were out of view. Of the small flock left to Father Theodore's care, Anne was specially regarded; she was good, and warmly faithful to the old cause, and at the same time had a merry, cheerful eye. But it then also struck the worthy Father how that eye was like the ripe sloe in colour, how the cheek beside it was as the peony-rose's tint, and the trim shape

more plump and buxom the last year or two; while she was an orphan, and Mrs. Brinds not quite so able to oversee everything as before. The Abbé resolved now to supply the aunt's deficiencies fully in such respects, and felt that he could not wholly regret the final departure of Robert Jackson; for his mind had been very sharply impressed with convictions of human depravity and of the frailty of mortals.

The ascertained news of the evening, at Captain Herbert's return, did not incline the Abbé in any degree to relax this wary guardianship. Sir Richard had received notice, it was true, of an active appointment, the most flattering to his professional merits,—and also to those late painfully-marked efforts, for which a good-service pension would of course fall to him besides, as to those similarly wounded in the previous action. His new commission was about to be made out, placing him in command of a sixty-eight-gun ship, the *Mars;* which was to form one of a fresh squadron of line-of-battle, preparing for despatch to the West India station, with the view of strengthening Vice-Admiral Rodney when he assumed the command there. In a private note from an under-secretary, a friend of Sir Charles Douglas, it was mentioned that the latter had already sailed to join the Admiral on his way out; the very satisfactory intelligence having just arrived, that Sir George had crushed the Spanish fleet under Don Juan de Langara, capturing seven of the line,—and this after having

skilfully relieved and strengthened Gibraltar, still besieged by combined force of the enemy. It was delicately added, that Captain Sir Richard Herbert's decision in a matter private to himself, but not unknown in high quarters, had some influence in heightening the due consideration for his recent state of health, which was now kept in mind when appointing him to the *Mars*. That fine ship had just been launched at Deptford, and would for some weeks be in the hands of the dockyard authorities; indeed, till further notice, it could not be necessary for him to come up to town. The present turn of affairs in the colonies rendering it scarce probable that fresh troops and ships would be required there before another spring, or the end of autumn at soonest.

Such was the news which, certainly, that night diffused an excitement at Herbert Court, and next morning tended to stir the house, as well as to urge the tedious workmen round. But they were hardly news of a kind to augur immediate departure, or forebode solitude and desertion to the Abbé and Mrs. Brinds; still less, unfortunately, to clear their path in regard of the superfluous Jackson. Sir Richard had one or two hints of this difficulty, both that morning and the night previous; he said something, indeed, of Jackson being soon required at Deptford,—where his rating would at once be that of a warrant-officer's mate, with prospects of speedy promotion. But the Captain was much occupied, and somewhat absent-minded in his replies; he seemed bent on some inward

purpose, that had evidently absorbed him on a sudden, startling even himself by its nature, though not without some sanguine hopes of the result. The Abbé could not doubt to what it related; for, by that time, Sir Richard's frequent visits were being paid at Wrixworth Hall, where most of the Spencer family had made their first summer visit. Miss Mary Spencer was not there, to be sure, nor Mrs. Spencer; the obvious reason being, that in a very few days the young lady was about to take the position of a near neighbour, by her marriage to the learned Rector of Emerton. A somewhat cold prospect, the latter, at least, for Mr. Horne's continuance of relations with his friend Miss Mary; as there was positively no intercourse whatever between Dr. Hickenbooth and himself.

The early morning meal was not over ere Sir Richard excused himself on some rather unintelligible ground of haste, and left the house prematurely for the day. Herbert Court and all the woods, and the meadows towards Wrixworth, were deep in July verdure; the old church-tower of the village shone aloft, with morning swallows still wheeling about it, over hazy shadows and sultry lights, above the morning smoke of the cottages. The dew was not off the eglantine in the hedges; the moist scent of blowing briar-roses, of woodbine, meadow-sweet, and new-mown hay, were inviting him as he struck into the old path he had once taken with Kate Spencer to his own house, two years before. It now led too quickly toward the Hall, though; he had hastened too precipitately on.

He had to come back again, a third of the way, if but to avoid reaching the place at the squire's breakfast-hour. Then, once more, he walked slower forward; and stopped to look into the wood,—wondering in what frame of mind he would pass that spot homeward again, and whether this would be very soon, to his probable dismay,—or perhaps, by some astounding fortune, later and happier than he could well yet hope. Finally, he made a dash onward, and came to the Hall gates.

Breakfast was over there already; Mr. Spencer and his eldest daughter, with her aunt Miss Duttridge and another guest, were talking in the room;—Mr. Spencer with the newspaper in hand, from which he hastened to speak with Sir Richard of the favourable tidings from Gibraltar, and the rumoured great success of Admiral Rodney over the Spanish admiral. Of the latter, Sir Richard gave him decided assurance; adding the few particulars known as yet; alluding also to his own appointment on active service, with the period of delay ere sailing. The eminent merchant and Sir Richard Herbert were now on those pleasant, cordial, almost warm though not intimate terms, which were unavoidable in the circumstances. It has been understood since, in fact, that the head of the great house of Broadby and Co. always had entertained a high esteem for Sir Richard.

She was not in the room — he had seen *that* before he entered it, by the mere want of a certain reflected light on other faces. They were so dull o his suppressed anxieties, that none of them

said—at least for many moments, it might be minutes, of trifling talk—whether anything had happened since yesterday afternoon; any relapse of her late illness, if not some sudden recal home to Bristol. So far from these things, however,—nobody else had missed her from the table till then:—she could only have gone out the last few minutes, when her uncle and Goscroft stepped across the park-corner to see how the haymakers got on. Miss Spencer, indeed, had seen her go with them: Jane said she had herself intended following—if they had left her time even to throw on a scarf, or find another hat instead of her own—which, in the country, her sister almost invariably took, if it lay near. Jane Spencer never had looked so beautiful in Sir Richard's eyes as when she considerately added—though somewhat in her languid manner—that she certainly knew the way and would be glad of his escort, if he cared to look at haymakers. He waited most patiently for her on the outer steps: he believed, as she guided him and he escorted her, that Jane's conversation was vivacious, though her steps were tedious; also that he sustained his part with credit in her estimation, and that, on the whole, her striking beauty was really but the true expression of her character. Her brother, too, the Graduate—a highly-educated young man of remarkable mental parts, although of late devoted to mercantile pursuits,—how amiably did *he* act on the occasion! While their uncle, the good-humoured squire of Wrixworth, now proved his unvaried friendliness towards Herbert. They *all* affected a

very delicate unconsciousness that his manner this morning denoted anything important, or that he could still have aught particular to say. They readily sacrificed their own enjoyment of *her* company for the time; not sure for how long, of course; nor even allowing the rustic labourers to observe, that it was more than an accidental division of the party which took place.

Thus, it is true, like lovers the two strayed apart, and beyond view. Yet it were absurd to suppose that the late uncommon events had left Herbert's suit to be still pressed or decided. He had not come in such eager suspense, that anxious morning, only for an object so unquestionably gained. The matter-of-fact opening of his errand was enough to show this. Nor less so, the tranquil tone or almost business-like interest of her replies; for the truth was, her short but violent illness had only covered an abrupt passage from the girl to the woman, from fitful impulses to deeper feeling. The flying bridge, so to speak, had fallen behind her into a chasm, on whose safer side she stood; changed to sedater maturity; afraid sometimes, perhaps, to look back at what might have been, nay, at what was done. Her brother Harry's position, no doubt, when abroad with Herbert, had served to interchange many unspoken thoughts. Since then, she had found out, how, in fevered ravings from the verge of death, Sir Richard's secret had been betrayed. Reading of it, still later, in words from the distance, she now knew well,

through words at hand, that it had been so from the first: and she had confessed, in return, that she sometimes had believed this. Still now, while health was bringing back the roundness and the sunny tints to her cheek, there was a shade of gravity over all: but she did not now need it, as perhaps formerly—when the mourning dress for old Mrs. Duttridge, and the sober accents which so well became a favoured grandchild, had made the airy spring of her beauty too sweet to him. Summer itself grew serious round their unseen walk.

He mentioned to her, in detail, the satisfactory communications he had received from the Admiralty officials. It was she, in fact, who had already fully decided him, as to continuance in the Service; where, to her view, the certainty of high professional success appeared more undoubted than he himself could think due to his abilities. She it was then, too, who, as for an instant his eye dropped toward the empty sleeve, had hurried on to other reasons; scarce betraying that she knew of captains and admirals who had gained victories for their country, in spite of losses so trifling. Harry was still at sea; the war was soon to be brought to an end: there had been as yet not even the least reference to so bold a conception, as that their marriage could take place before peace was declared. It must be confessed that there must have been something in Kate Spencer of the womanhood of the old Northern race, the daughters of the Vikings—Chriemhilds, Huldegonds, bright-

haired Berthas,—fit companions to noble Berserkirs with streaming locks of gold, who raged into battle, sea-kings of yore.

Being now informed of Admiral Rodney's successes, her eyes sparkled. At the very destruction and capture of so many of Admiral Langara's Spanish fleet, it might have been thought no fancy crossed her mind, of the actual scene with its stormy close in the Bay of Biscay, when Sir George with difficulty reached an anchorage for himself and prizes.

"Owing to this gratifying intelligence," added Sir Richard,—as they went on, her hand upon his arm,—"there is no such hurry, you understand, with regard either to Gibraltar or the West Indies?"

"True," she said; "I suppose not."

"And I hear 'tis confirmed that the rebels under Washington rather lose ground than otherwise, and are much disheartened in consequence."

"Do you think, then, there is any prospect of a very speedy termination?" Naturally, while asking it, she was looking up to him as an authority on the point.

"No—no," answered Herbert; with a firmness only to have been sustained by the intensest resolution. "No—the French seem more bent on it at sea than ever—the Dutch now coming to their help. Sir George and the others will have enough to do by the end of the season. Though Count D'Estaing, 'tis said, is acknowledged no match for

Rodney, and such changes in the French command cannot but give time. Still, as for the squadron to which the *Mars* will belong, it *may*, you see, leave at a day's warning."

There was a start of her fingers, holding closer, and a paleness on her face. Unfortunately for his drift, however, he had formerly dwelt much on the cheering ground of confidence at sea—that cannon-balls seldom followed each other through the same shot-hole,—and that few cases were known of the same officer or man gaining a right to *two* successive pensions like his. Besides, had not he and Harry both passed safe through a terrible action, and only been endangered through a most extraordinary catastrophe? An idea, in fact, still prevails, that captains and admirals look on from secure heights of command, like generals on land. There was nothing that Kate could have said in reply, so she was silent.

"For all that," persisted Sir Richard, awkwardly enough, "I do not mean to say we shall sail immediately—indeed, for some months to come, if in fact—that is, I have here a letter next thing to official. The *Mars* is at Deptford, and—and but newly launched!"

"Yes?"

The open interest she was always taking in such matters must have prompted the response. At the same time, as he had stopped to open a gate on the way, she was heedlessly pulling to pieces a new-blown rose he had brought her from the

Abbé's borders; her whole face now rivalling it in hue. "Newly launched?" she said. As if that were the most wonderful and incomprehensible of naval facts.

Herbert turned in time to see it, luckily. "Yes, I must *entreat*, Catherine! Let it take place along with Mary's—at the same *time*—as things now stand, what reason can there be against it! It is impossible, of course, that a newly-launched ship can sail before autumn—the season being then broken, too, and no likelihood of action till spring—as to Deptford, why, we could go and stay near there, when *you* might see the ship! What can be the use of putting off till the war ends—when the fact is, as any one may see, dearest, that there is very little difference after all between——"

Astounded at the request, she had gazed up in wonder; not at him, so much as at a tree contiguous.

"Why, Mary's marriage is next week!" exclaimed Kate, looking confusedly down again.

"This is Thursday," was the obstinate rejoinder, as he led her on through the field-gate. "I *know* that Mary's takes place on Thursday, the twenty-eighth; but, surely there is time enough, Kate? *Surely?*"

"We should have to return home at once to Bristol!" she said. "That is—I mean, at least, Jane and I. And only think of mamma—*think* of what has to be done—think, Richard, oh, think of the dresses, the——"

They passed on, and no one knows the rest of the dialogue. A distant peasant-urchin from the park of the Hall, in charge of grazing cattle, had observed Sir Richard leave the gate unclosed behind; for the naval baronet's singular attention to dates had been too close to allow, probably, of equal care in all other matters. The youth followed, hallooing, though unheard: yet he was not too late, in precaution towards his herd, to shut the barrier here left upon the track of happy, though too prosaic lovers.

Enough to state that the marriage ceremony was performed along with Mary's and Dr. Hickenbooth's, on the 28th of July, 1780, in the parish church of St. Mary Redcliffe; the rector of that church officiating, unassisted save by the inferior acolytes usual at that period. Lady Diana Fanshawe was present; not so, however, Mrs. Beauchamp of Beauchamp Cliff. The bridesmaids were three in number; Jane Spencer and Miss Harrington in Mary's case; in Kate's, Celia Harrington alone: perhaps the sole inconvenience resulting, on the whole, from the slight hurry at last. The neighbouring sea-side village of Portishead was destined as the scene of the honeymoon for Dr. Hickenbooth and his bride. Sir Richard and the newly-installed Lady Herbert posted towards town by easy stages, eventually passing the winter at home. In spring, however, Sir Richard sailed with the squadron, in command of the *Mars* as appointed.

With the brief remainder of the war we are

not here concerned. A slight incident, occurring but a few days subsequent to these ceremonies, can alone detain us from the close.

It was one pleasant evening that the Abbé Horne strolled out in the old "home-park" of Herbert Court, after the hours of study and of workmen's noise. Nibbling sheep pastured around him in the slanting light; which light, as it rose up the fine old trees into the foliage, drew his notice to a rather too-conspicuous attempt at an inscription, in the bark of a noble beech which he had ever regarded with peculiar care. It was a somewhat rude incision, in fact; lately made, and still unfinished; presenting the characters above, "*A. B.*,"—midway, an uncouth device resembling a cross-barred diagram, or perhaps a coiled snake, —below, again, "R. J." and with it, apparently another "A. B." He had not considered the circumstance many seconds, when, at a stifled rustling and movement behind the tree, he became aware that an attempt at concealment was there being made, doubtless by the offender in question. His dismay was great at the discovery which ensued. Two persons of the different sexes stood there; being no others than Robert Jackson and Anne Brinds; the latter trembling before his own indignant glance, although the arm of the audacious Robert, to the last moment, protectingly encircled her waist.

The Abbé dismissed the maiden at once, and in silent tears, to the house. He turned to Jackson,

whom his captain had for the time left behind; almost forgotten, though certainly not unindustrious during the daily labours of the house, the garden, or the fields.

"It has almost come to this, my good man," said the Abbé, sternly, after listening to Jackson's stout defence, "that you are bound, I think, to wed this foolish young woman."

The looks of Jackson visibly brightened up. "Well, your Reverence," answered he, promptly, "we was sartainly a thinkin' it would be better!"

"Yet you are of different faiths—you are aware, surely," and the old priest's features wore a frown of ominous resolution, "that Anne Brinds is—*a Catholic!* I at least still trust so, and must take means to ensure it. She has pious relatives elsewhere, to whose keeping for the present——"

"Lord love you, sir—your Reverence, that's to say, axing your Reverence's pardon," so pleaded the man-o'-war's-man with earnestness, "we're both of us Christians, it's to be hoped! For the matter of that," added he, with a shrewd thought in his eye, "there arn't no orders against A.B.'s, no, nor warrant-officers neither, for to turn Roman. I've knowed more than one Roman afloat, if ye'll believe me, your worship! S' help me, it carn't be very far out o' the way, so to speak, no, nor wrong, if a man goes by his wife's notions,—and the long and the short of it is, look, see, your Holiness,—*w'otever* that 'ere young woman thinks fit to believe, why, I'm d——d if I don't swear by!"

He emphatically threw down his straw hat, contemplating it as if it were a symbol of irrevocable decision; and appeared to the Abbé in the light of a willing proselyte.

The latter paused, however. Jackson had indeed been attending of late at the little chapel; his conduct had otherwise been of the most tractable as well as sober kind: but the priest required surer signs. "No—the first point is," he remarked, "to ascertain the possibility of Mrs. Brinds, her aunt, for a moment entertaining the idea. I shall endeavour, to the best of my power, to propitiate her. In that case, observe, the holy sacrament must be celebrated by me, though at my sole risk from the law. The usual ceremony, of course, (he meant the Protestant)—implying the civil contract—must follow this at once."

Mrs. Brinds received the Abbé's serious inquiry in a manner most surprising. "Dear heart, Father Theodore,—certainly!" murmured she, curtseying low. "I could never one moment a set myself contrary to your Reverence's judgment. To be sure, Mr. Jackson have sought every way possible as might be deserving of such,—from Sir Richard also,—and are likewise sure of the situation which it will be sufficient enough, I do hope,—but time will tell? What a load is abeing taken off all our minds, though,—to find your Reverence so agreeable!"

"Where and how do you propose, ma'am," asked he, with some little impatience, "that the couple should live?"

"I do hope and trust, Father Theodore," said the prudent housekeeper, "that there won't be no question about how they're agoing to set up house. For what with his salary, which it's saved up for him by Government, and what with prizes which it seems they are got by good conduct to foreign powers, Mr. Bob says the first moment he lands, your Reverence——"

"You do not mean to say you intended putting this off till *then*, Mrs. Brinds?" was the peremptory question; for although the Abbé Horne might not know all the windings of human nature in womankind, yet he was acquainted with the world at large. "No, no, ma'am—not only is the end of this present war reserved from our view, but the term of Robert Jackson's stay here is as yet too indefinite for *that!* Their arrangements must be made directly, and the sacred sanction of their union must follow without delay. Be so good, therefore, as proceed accordingly."

"'Mr. Bob,' indeed!" meditated the Abbé in his studious privacy. "I might already add, I suppose, 'Bob, forsooth!' Who knows how rapidly the familiarising diminutives might, if too imperatively constrained, tend to a more dangerous inflection? '*Naturam expellas furcâ, tamen usque recurret*'—so says the Pagan poet, satirically. Let us, rather, *recognise* this heathen nature of ours, and raise it cheerfully heavenward! Anne Brinds will not make a worse Catholic, surely, for helping to confirm this half-barbarian mariner in his better

inclinations? Certain it seems that he will be all the soberer, all the richer, that he will fight none the worse, and is not by any means the likelier to be killed. I shall write at once to Sir Richard."

He did so; and, in the circumstances of delay to the sailing of the *Mars*, had he not received an approving answer, he could not but have felt surprised. The housekeeper, Mrs. Brinds, had long been a saving, thrifty woman; the Abbé himself possessed some slender funds: together they supplied the means to furnish and repair an old cottage on the Manor, to be divided between the young pair and another enterprising couple of still homelier prospects. There, after hours, Jackson was straightway seen falling to work like a Trojan or a Crusoe; rivalled in vain by the future neighbour. The marriage took place forthwith, in both these cases; and the evening home-coming procession astonished the hamlet, nay, drew spectators from the village of Wrixworth, where the curate had performed the public ceremony. In gardening, Jackson was afterwards not unsuccessful; he was not below par in rough carpentry, in smith-work rather above it, also good at cobbling and tailoring, especially the more ornamental parts; but in the indescribable department of odd jobs or novel expedients, he surpassed emulation or praise. When the time ultimately arrived for his repairing to Deptford, where the fitting out and also the manning of the *Mars* required his presence long before she sailed —at that time he had begun to keep a pig; the

charge of which was not, of course, neglected after his departure, though for a while it appeared to pine. Even subsequently to the sailing of the squadron, months after his last flying visit, Jackson's decided and rising popularity in this rural district was renewed; nay, stamped for perpetuity, down to tradition itself—by a domestic occurrence quite as pleasing to all concerned, as it was calculated to redound proudly to his credit. For, early in the next ensuing summer, Mrs. Brinds had to attend at the first birth in her niece's household; which produced twin Jacksons to the admiring circle, for the delectation of the Manor, and the Abbé's ill-disguised complacency. The worthy chaplain soon christened those two infant models of the herculean captain of the foretop; and that without fear of challenge by the altered law. During the two remaining years of the war, the curly-haired and blue-eyed growth of the two boys served to keep in view their father's characteristic good-fortune in his calling of the sea.

From the great victory of Rodney, he returned without a wound, a boatswain's mate; well able to support and furnish the growing family, for whose previous comfort his pay had been liberally "allocated" before. He still, of course, followed out his vocation; and lived to be a senior boatswain in the fleets which gained, under the great Lord Nelson, the famous victories of the Nile and Trafalgar. To this day, on the trunk of a very venerable beech-tree, may be seen the decayed hollow

which indicates the identical spot, where alone the Abbé Horne could have detected Jackson's rude carving of Anne Brinds's initials, joined to his own by the representation of a true-lovers' knot. He left no other attempt at correspondence, never having learnt, even to the last, to write or read.

CHAPTER XV.

L'ENVOI.

"To Monsieur Le Vicomte de La Trebouille,
of the French Artillery, Boston, United
States of America.

"Hôtel des Americains, Rue St. Honoré, Paris,
Juillet 28me, 1780.

"O FLORIAN! All is lost, I would have said, Florian! It is, only, that your name—your friendship—for a moment brought back the detested thoughts of the past! Pardon me—do I associate you with these! No—a thousand times No!

"When it returns, I know not what I say—what I think—what hideous persuasion overpowers me, that the hell of those priestly mummers is not altogether feigned! Yes—it is in the abhorred island I have left! At moments, it seems about to burst out even here from within—from within, Florian." (The Count proceeds to give a rapid and

incoherent, though so far true account of his frustrated attempt at Miss Spencer's abduction.) "And to-day, they are perhaps together! Yet I hate even her and her beauty—*all* that allured me in that hated country, all that was putting on so specious an aspect of invitation, of solidity, of grandeur and virtue. It is as if I had been only learning better *what* to detest, and *how*. It is as if all were now inverted, and thrust against my heart.

"Coguel was not merely a monster—an atrocity embodied—a miscreant beyond utterance loathsome. He is a demon—there is some infernal inspiration which it infuriates one to——for my part, on the contrary, I remain tranquil. It was said that he was wounded, but I do not believe that *fiends* can be wounded! You will say they do not exist. The truth is, as I was about to explain, I had a servant with me—but I have told you before of poor Adolphe. When we meet, you shall hear all, however—for I am hastening to join you. Do you recollect, my friend, how *you* used to urge this! How *I* had the infatuation to counsel you in turn!

"Well, we are busy here. The court is now at the Tuileries, where, let me tell you, there is now no coldness towards those who offer services in the colonies. The seas of the Antilles and Caribs are familiar to me, and I have had not a little experience of their navigation and climate, in my youth. Along with the post of Secretary to M. l'Amiral-en-Chef, the veteran Comte de Grasse (who replaces the inert D'Estaing),—I shall rank as sub-

lieutenant for the present. Yet I feel a fire within, assuring me of a genius for war—for revenge, at least. The vicissitudes of chance are strange—they bring men curiously in contact *again*. Ah!—and perhaps chance does not exempt the other sex.

"We study the system of naval tactics now in vogue. It is due to an old monk of Louis Quatorze's reign, *Le Père Paul Hoste*—thus I need not tell you, that although worthy of a Jesuit, it is mechanical. Its mere evasions do not satisfy *me*.

"Louis XVI. is a pedant—he would perhaps still have allowed his ministers to trifle with me about the title I claimed: but I gained access to her Majesty, whose power is immense. Marie Antoinette possesses a spirit above details—her beauty is worthy of it, although I have seen faces——but, in a word, I succeeded in my claim.

"The great Franklin is here, unshaken by reports of vacillation or disaster, even of General Washington's most suspicious tediousness or incapacity. This great man shares the undying resolution which I feel, and has personally expressed it to me. He once *lived in England*—can it be that he has some hidden cause to sympathise with me?

"I send this by the swift despatch-frigate, *La Junon*, so that it may reach you while the fleet is only on its way. We are destined, however, to take the northern passage, and first to crush the weak attempts of the enemy on the Southern States; before joining with the Dutch and Spaniards to overwhelm the West Indian Islands.

"A friend is more than ever necessary to me, Florian!—more than ever dear!

"Till we meet, try to remember the same Etienne as before—towards you he is not changed by being now

"DE ST. AMAND."

This letter duly reached the gallant young French officer; probably when on the march to strengthen Charleston against its second siege by a British force. The American town was taken, however: Lieutenant De La Trebouille, of the artillery, fell bravely at his post. As has been mentioned previously, the three letters from Etherege were found among the most treasured documents of the unfortunate officer, when these were unscrupulously appropriated.

Florian was not there to receive his friend.

When the thrice-unhappy Orestes flies, followed by the furies, how shall he endure fate—with no Pylades to soothe him from their abhorred gestures!

THE END.

C. WHITING, BEAUFORT HOUSE, STRAND.